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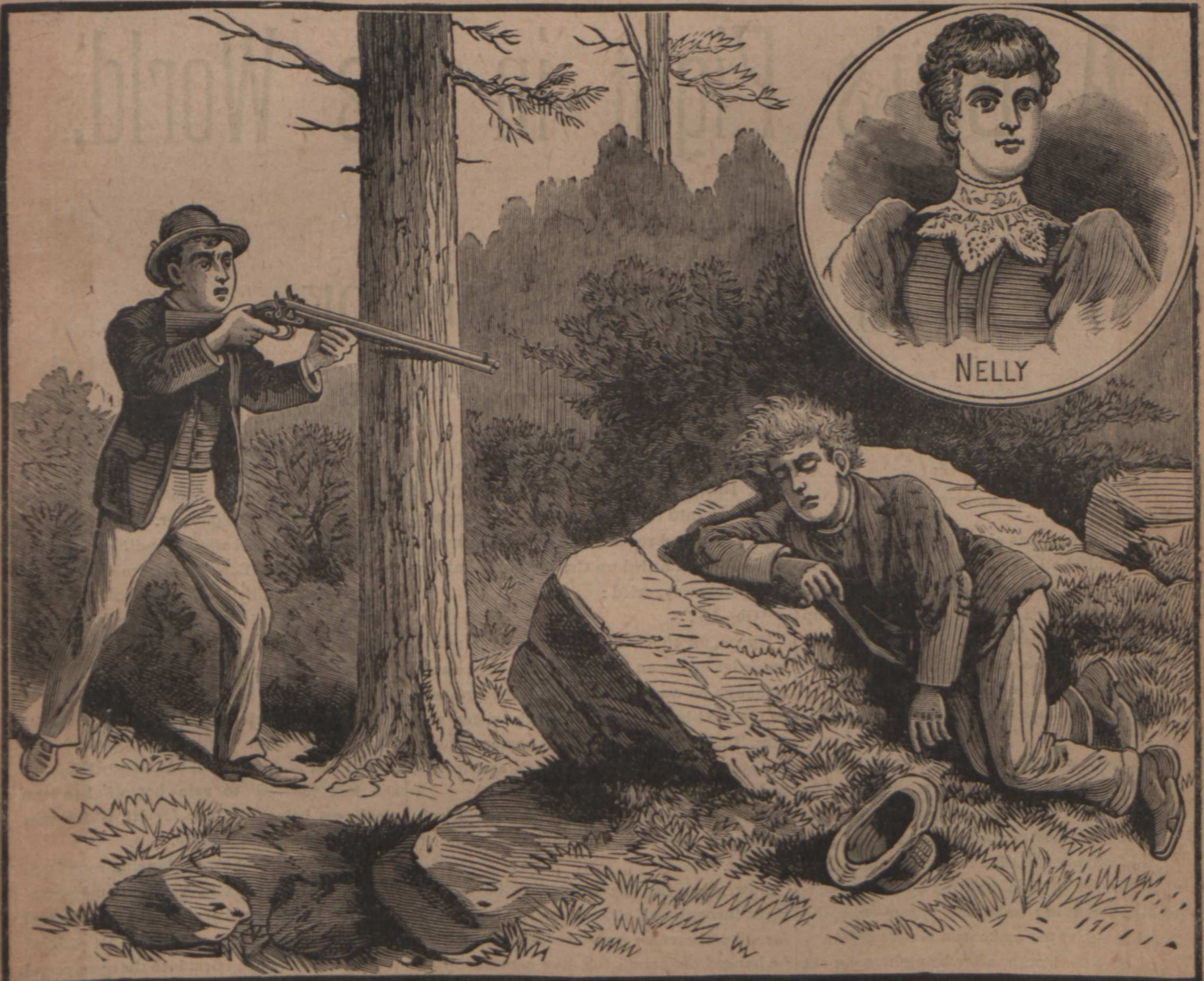
FRANK TOUSEY, PUBLISHER, 34 & 36 NORTH MOORE ST., N. Y.
NEW YORK, May 22, 1896.

{ PRICE }
{ 5 CENTS. }

Vol. II.

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Master of Himself: or, A Boy's Fight in the World. By Commodore Ah-Look.



Resting the barrel of his gun against the trunk of a pine tree, Hi screwed up his mouth and taking good aim, fired, the report echoing like artillery from the surrounding peaks, while, at the same instant Birdie uttered a yell and sprang to his feet.

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Master of Himself

OR,

A Boy's Fight in the World.

By COMMODORE AH-LOOK.

CHAPTER I.

WANTED TO BE HIS OWN MASTER.

HI HILDRETH was alone in Mr. Dick's drug store, Whitehall, New York, and was leaning upon the counter, with his chin in his hands, watching a girl who was coming up the street with his dinner.

He was a good-looking fellow, though just at that moment he happened to be out of temper, so his face was anything but a pleasant one.

"I'd jolly well like to see old Dick sticking here from daylight until dark, as he makes me!" he growled. "Here I want to go to the United Sociables' picnic and he says I shan't. This is slavery! Call it being an apprentice? A lot I learn beyond washing out musty bottles and serving soda and syrup—why, he won't even let me make up a simple prescription—just as though, after being here for six months, I don't know poisons from innocent

drugs!" saying which he scowled worse than ever, then, rising from his bent position, withdrew into the rear room of the store and began to pound roots in a big mortar; meanwhile the girl toiled up the hill, and halting in the doorway, cried:

"Oh—Hi!"

Hiram, for that was his proper given name, never let up for an instant, but banged away, although he was well aware of the presence of his food-bearer, who was his sister and Mrs. Dick's help, so the new-comer entered the store, and going to the back apartment, looked in, saying:

"Here's your dinner, Hi. Corned beef, cabbage and berry pie! Come and take it, brother."

Now, when the boy was angry he was so, right through and all round with friend and foe alike, therefore, instead of replying to her, he banged on, perspiring like a prize fighter and looking almost as ugly while the girl

smiled and watched his curly hair as it flew up and down in his frantic endeavors to smash the roots into powder.

Both boy and girl were foundlings from an institute in New York City, from which they had been taken by Mr. and Mrs. Dick, and more different beings could scarcely be imagined.

Hi was dark featured, quick tempered and brave as a lion, resentful, yet a thoroughly good boy, one who acted first and thought afterwards, while Nellie was gentle, fair haired and high spirited, but so sensible that she had learned to rule herself—her one weakness being her love for Hi, which was both sisterly and motherly.

The boy whanged away, dancing round the mortar and working in a ridiculously earnest fashion, when, all of a sudden, crack went the pestle, and at the same time Hi pitched forward, falling head first into the open vessel as Nellie, who was terribly scared, seized him

by the accident not resulted in a serious cut on the cheek, it would have been something to laugh at, and, as it was, Nelly could not avoid smiling, for his face and well-oiled locks were smothered with powdered root-bark, which gave him a most comical appearance; however, when she noticed his wound, she said, in an affrighted voice:

"Are you hurt, brother?"

Now Hi was not the boy to be scared by a cut cheek, or did it make him any sweeter tempered, so, instead of replying to her kind question, he shook himself in order to rid his hair of the powder, then turned to a water-trap and proceeded to bathe his face, while Nelly, who was used to his ugly moods, did her best to aid him.

When he was thoroughly cleansed he glanced into the looking-glass, and saw that the cut was deeper than he had thought; so, holding a wad of lint to it, he rushed into the front store and began to hunt for a case containing surgical needles and thread, the girl following, saying:

"What ails you, Hi? have I done anything to offend you?"

Standing in front of a large glass, he wiped the blood from his cheek, and without answering her, made a bungling attempt to stitch together the gaping edges of his wound, whereupon she took the needle from his trembling hand, and skillfully accomplished the operation, observing, in a gentle voice:

"That's a bad cut, brother."

Any ordinary boy would have been softened by this, and have replied pleasantly, but Hi was not by any means a commonly angry youth; however, as his sister knew him to be, at heart, kind and generous, she forgave his silence and patiently waited until he had eaten his dinner, when she walked away wondering what had caused him to be so unusually grumpy.

Like most youths of his calibre, Hi knew on whom to vent his ill humor, so, presently, when a young woman entered with a prescription, he was civil enough to look at it and say:

"Dick's out!"

"But mother wants to use a powder at once," urged the person who had brought it. "Dr. Ayres says she must take one right away. You can make it up—it's only camomile and powdered rhubarb."

Now it so happened that the prescription read:

"5 grains calomel.

"20 grains rhubarb."

But Hi, taking the girl's word for it, and being anxious to show off, and make up the prescription before Mr. Dick returned from his dinner, reached down the calomel drawer and weighed out four five grain doses, observing to the young woman:

"What's the matter with your mother?"

"Biliousness," answered the other. "She's blind with bile!"

"Why don't she try Dick's compound liver and stomach pills?" demanded Hi.

"Be-cause—Doctor Ayres has ordered her camomile and rhubarb!" smartly returned his customer, adding: "We don't want any of your old liver and stomach stuff!"

"You can leave it alone!" growled the boy, "one dose would do her more good than a pound of these powders!"

"You know a lot about it, don't you?" snapped the young lady, receiving the package. "How much?"

"Forty cents!" said the lad. "One dose to be taken now, and one every night—I've written the directions on the label."

Paying him the required amount, she hurried away, while Hi, not liking to enter the prescription in the book, placed it on Mr. Dick's desk, then served a man who came in for a plain soda.

About noon, the streets of Whitehall are almost deserted, but, as people get through with dinner, the place becomes more animated.

As the clock struck one the boy saw the first van-load of picnickers pass the store window; the men and women, mostly loggers and their sweethearts, cheering lustily; rather a rough crowd for a youngster to join, still there were many lads among them whom he knew, and, as they went by, they shouted:

"Hi Hildreth! Oh, Hi, ain't you coming?"

Hi was too angry to go out and tell them, so they rode gaily on, while Hi sat sullenly, crouching behind the sign in the window, thinking:

"If I was only my own master!"

Roused from his reverie by the arrival of customers for soda and syrup, he resumed his duties, for Hi was not one to shirk work, but his heart was far away, up in the pine covered hills, with the boys and girls of the United Sociables.

After awhile, Mr. Dick came in, and, going to the desk, noticed the prescription, saying:

"Will they send for this or do they want you to take it?"

"No," granted Hi; "it's only a simple thing. I—I made it up."

The old druggist re-read the prescription, then said:

"Come here, Hi!"

CHAPTER II.

HI GOES TO THE PICNIC.

There are some things that, although they only take a few minutes to accomplish, seem to cover a great space of time.

One of these was Hi's progress from his corner to Mr. Dick's desk.

He knew that he was going to be reprimanded, and was in no hurry to receive reproof.

"My boy!" began the old druggist, nervously stroking his beard, his only sign of anger, "have I not,

over and over again, told you never to put up prescriptions?"

"You have!" growled Hi.

"Then why did you make up this one?" kindly continued his employer.

"Well, I guess I know how to prepare a simple thing like that!" grumbled the lad. "It ain't half so difficult as balancing the quantity of strawberry and raspberry when folks wants 'em mixed."

"You think so, do you?" said Mr. Dick, handing him the paper. "Perhaps you are right. Read that?"

Hi took the prescription but, being ugly, did not more than glance at it, then blurted out:

"Five grains—camomile—twenty grains rhubarb—mix—four powders!"

"Read it again," smilingly observed the old gentleman. "We druggists have to be very particular."

"Five grains camomile!" once more began Hi, in a surly tone, then, happening to see what the word really was, gasped out, "why, it's calomel."

"Yes," nodded Mr. Dick. "A nice mess you've made of it! Now, wash those glasses while I put up the prescription correctly, then take it round to the lady, and explain how the error occurred."

This was said very kindly, but the boy was angry, so he did not reply, while, to add to his ill-temper, the last van-load of picnic folks passed, with the band playing merrily.

Mr. Dick had been a good friend to him, and he knew it, but, spite of this, when the old man handed him the powders and directed him what to say, he flatly refused.

"You won't?" said his employer. "Hiram Hildreth, I order you to take these powders to Mrs. Seacole's, do you hear me? You might have poisoned the lady. I am very angry with you!"

Hi did hear, and responded by silently receiving the package, then quitted the store, muttering aloud:

"Wish I was my own master."

Mr. Dick smiled at this, for he had known what it was to rough it.

He had taken Hi out of charity, fed, clothed and cared for him, given him a good education, treated him like a son and made him his apprentice, meaning to leave him his business, but the lad's temper, like a barrier, had risen in his way and destroyed the old man's plans, so, as his protegee sullenly made off, he sighed and said:

"Your own master, my poor chap. Why, what you want to learn is to become master of yourself!" then fell to thinking how best to cure the boy of his ugly spirit.

Hi was just mad enough to be spoiling for a fight, so, after delivering the powders, and making the necessary explanation, he sauntered or rather swaggered along in a "knock-a-chip-off-my-shoulder, if you dare" fashion, presently coming across two boys who were evidently bound for the picnic.

"Hello, Hi!" they cried. "We're going, ain't you?"

He had told all his chums that he meant to go, so did not like to say he was not, and thus make them think that he was Dick's slave; besides, why could he not go? It would only bring another gentle scolding from the old druggist.

"How are you going, fellers?" he demanded. "I kinder thought better of it—it's hot up there."

"Oh, git out!" they cried. "Hot! Why, it's cool on the mountain. Guess old Dick won't let y'go, hey?"

"What's he got to do with it?" growled Hi.

"Ain't yer allus saying he won't let yer go here an' there?" sneered the biggest lad. "Well, we're going anyhow; we kin do as we dern well like if yer can't."

"I'm going, boys," surlily replied Hi. "I've met with an accident, and cut my cheek. I don't mean to work any more to day."

In another moment they were climbing up the steep ascent, and in due time arrived at the pine grove, where they found a half-intoxicated mob of holiday-makers, who bade them chip in and enjoy themselves.

The afternoon was warm, and the beer, served out in profusion heady, so it did not take long to make Hi just intoxicated enough to be ready for anything, and feeling indignant at some remark made by a chum, he challenged him to fight.

Of course this delighted the crowd, and when the foolish lads pitched in, everybody cheered and called them brave fellows, the result being Hi punished his opponent, but, as the latter was the son of the man who had organized the picnic, our hero was ordered to quit the party.

"Oh, I'll go," he said, resuming his coat, "I've had about enough of this crowd!" with which he walked off down the mountain towards Whitehall, directing his steps for Mr. Dick's house, and thinking: "I'll wash up and have my tea, then go to the store and relieve the boss!"

As he was descending the narrow path he came across a ragged-looking figure, lying on its back among the sweet fern, and was about to pass it when the scarecrow spoke, saying:

"How do, Hi?" and he discovered that it was an old schoolmate named Frank Bird, or Birdie as they used to call him, a fellow who had been away from the place.

As it suited him to sit down and rest, he threw himself beside the wanderer, and demanded:

"Where have you been, Birdie?"

"Oh, I've traveled 'round," yawned the other. "I've been east all the winter!"

"Had a pretty good time?" said Hi.

If Birdie had told the truth he would have related a woeful story of starvation and suffering, of sleeping in tramp's houses and clothing himself by exchanging suits with various scarecrows, set up by the farmers as a terror to small birds, but, though nothing better than a tramp, he was proud, so he related a very different tale, winding up with:

"You see, I'm my own master, Hi! Nobody dares

boss me! You try a free life for awhile—it's splendid.

"Nobody to wake you up in the morning and make you turn out, hail, rain-storm or snow!" said Hi, leaning his throbbing face upon his hands. "By Sammy, that must be just elegant—but—say, Birdie, what have you made by it?"

Birdie yawned again, then replied:

"How much have you made?"

"Nothing!" said Hi. "Mr. Dick don't pay me any wages!"

"Well," smilingly observed the tramp, producing a roll of bills, "I can beat you. Here's thirty-five dollars, and I've got a new suit at home," with which he rose and said, "calculate I'll go and eat my supper—won't you come along, Hi?" However the latter, who felt anything but well, thanked him, saying:

"Not to-night, Birdie," then renewed his walk homeward.

On reaching Mr. Dick's he slipped up to his room and peeped into the glass to find his eyes blackened, his cheek split open and bleeding, and a "mouse" on his forehead as big as an egg.

"I can't go to the store this way," he grumbled. "Won't Mr. Dick talk to me to-morrow!" after which he contrived to close the gap on his cheek, and to somewhat reduce the mouse in size, then throwing himself upon the bed, fell into a troubled sleep.

About ten o'clock he was awakened by the druggist, who was putting an ice-cooled towel about the boy's head.

Motioning him to rise, the old man said:

"Been in the wars, Hi?"

"Yes," was the sullen reply.

"Have you heard the dreadful news?" inquired Mr. Dick. "There was a fight at the picnic, and two men were shot dead, while four others are not expected to live."

CHAPTER III.

HI LIES OFF AND TAKES A REST.

THE news staggered Hi, but he would not show what he felt, so, merely remarking that he was sorry, he allowed his employer to tend him, and after thanking the good old man, once more lay down, thinking:

"He'll give it me to-morrow." But when Mr. Dick saw him at breakfast all he said was:

"You best not come down to the store to-day, Hiram; lie off and take a rest."

This was worse than a scolding, and instead of making the boy feel at ease, rendered him more bitter than before; so, entering the kitchen, he seated himself and began to watch Nelly.

"Can I do anything for you?" she said; "I'm sorry to see you look so bad. Hi, Mr. Dick feels awfully about it."

"That's because he can't have me slaving down to the store!" snarled Hi; "I'm only an apprentice. I'm his nigger. Wish I was my own master."

"Hi," she observed, pausing in her work, "Mr. Dick is a good man; it's yourself, not he, who is to blame."

"Oh, you'll always stand up for him," he cried. "You think Mr. and Mrs. Dick are perfection. You don't have to slave from sunrise to sunset as I do."

"I get up an hour before you, brother," she quietly answered. "You know that. Do I go to bed before you?"

"Oh, but you don't have to work in a beastly drug store and to put up with everybody's temper, same as I do," he growled.

"Perhaps it would be as well for us not to go into that," she smilingly replied. "Brother, you'd be perfectly splendid if you'd only master yourself."

"That's what Mr. Dick is always preaching," he said. "Pshaw! I don't love my chains. I want to be free, to roam about where I please. God never intended boys should be slaves; that's what I am. I'm old Dick's nigger."

"Hi," said the girl, turning quickly upon him, "get out of this. You don't know what a good man Mr. Dick is. I'd work my fingers to the bone to show him how grateful I am."

"Pooh!" growled the boy rising, "he pays you, he makes me work for nothing."

"He's promised, if you behave well, to give you a share in the business," indignantly answered Nelly. "What more can you expect?"

"To be treated like a man!" said Hi. "He keeps me at it from one week to another—it's shameful!"

"Does he ever ask you to go to the store on Sundays?" she demanded. "Do you not get out, half the time, taking home medicines? I'd like to know who would have done for you what he has—would put up with your peculiar temper and disposition? If you're not happy, Hi, it's all through yourself!"

"That will do, Nell!" he fiercely replied. "Don't you speak to me again!" with which he strode off and ascending the hill proceeded to the house, or rather shanty, owned by Mrs. Bird, where he inquired for her son.

"Birdie has taken his gun and gone shooting," said the woman. "Won't you come in, Hi?" but the place was unsavory, so our hero kept on, and hearing the report of a fowling piece to his left, soon came across the vagabond.

"What, got another holiday?" jeered Birdie, as Hi sauntered towards him. "Has your master gone on a spree, and closed the store? Oh, I forgot, you're apprenticed to old Dick—he never goes on a bend!"

"Keep Mr. Dick's name out of your ugly mouth," said Hi, who, in his heart, loved and respected the old druggist, so, seeing that his friend was in a bad humor, Birdie asked him if he wanted a shot.

"If I can see a rabbit to fire at," answered the boy. "Come over to Burnt-Pine Hollow, there's lots of bunnies there."

"I'm too derned lazy," said the other. "Let's sit here and smoke."

"I don't smoke," returned Hi. "Well, you loaf round there and I'll go off to the hollow," with which he moved along the range and was presently blazing away.

For awhile Birdie smoked lazily, but, finally, hearing shot after shot, he rose and moved slowly in the direction of the sport; however, finding the distance too great and the day too warm, he sank upon some soft moss and presently fell asleep, leaving his tousled head exposed over the edge of a low rock that formed his pillow.

He was not a downright, bad-hearted fellow, but was rather a victim to chronic laziness.

It so happened that right by that very stone, Hi had started a skunk, so, on nearing it upon his home stretch he paused, and seeing Birdie's rough wig, muttered:

"There's that derved critter agin. Well, I'll fix it this time!"

As he uttered these words the sleeper turned over, presenting only a few hairs of his head above the stone, whereupon the gunner said, in a low voice:

"I can wait, you varmint! It's all in my day's work!" then, while watching for the skunk to move again, began to think how much nicer it was to go gunning than to be cooped up in a 18x50 drug store.

"I know Nelly's just as good as she can be," he mused, "but slavery is slavery and freedom is freedom. How lovely this is, now; here I am with a gun—a new one—bought by Birdie—seven rabbits and the woods to roam in—nobody to bid me to do this or that or tother—why, it's perfectly splendid! I'm big, almost a man, yet have to stew and sweat in that old drug-store and run my feet off carrying out pills and mixtures. What's the good of a share in a business that you don't like? Pshaw!"

The last exclamation partly aroused Birdie, who turned half over, and once more exhibited the top of his frizzy black head.

Resting the barrel of his gun against the trunk of a pine-tree, Hi screwed up his mouth and taking good aim, fired, the report echoing like artillery from the surrounding peaks, while, at the same instant, Birdie uttered a yell and springing to his feet, frantically tore at his scalp, screaming:

"Oh, I'm shot, I'm shot!" then with his face smothered with blood, rushed down the mountain side in the direction of Whitehall.

"My gracious!" gasped Hi. "I thought he was a skunk!" after which dropping his rabbits and gun, he started after the wounded boy.

For one badly hurt, Birdie got over the ground pretty quickly, but after awhile began to stumble and presently fell fainting.

Hi was quickly by his side, and raising him, threw the bleeding boy over his shoulder, then started for Mr. Dick's drug-store.

The old gentleman examined the wound, after which he observed:

"I told you to keep quiet, Hiram! Go home, my son, go home!"

CHAPTER IV.

NELLY'S GOOD FORTUNE.

For several days Hi remained very quiet, helping Nelly do chores and gradually recovering his good looks, and within a week was back to the store again.

His sister had given him a severe talking to, and he made up his mind to try and do better, but, after a time, he forgot his promises, and, associating with Birdie, began once more to chafe under the restraint of his apprenticeship.

Here was a boy with a good home, kind friends and everything in reason that he required, out of sorts with himself and the world, simply because he could not master his own evil temper.

He knew that Birdie was a scamp, that the fellow never worked if he could loaf, spite of which he would associate with him and spend hours in listening to the pack of lies he told. However, it is probable, that, had not a strange event occurred, he would have settled down and remained at Whitehall; the matter which decided him being as follows:

One afternoon, in the absence of his employer, a hack-carriage stopped in front of the drug-store, seeing which Hi proceeded outside and assisted a lady to alight from the vehicle.

Following him into the building she asked to see Mr. Dick, whereupon Hi informed her that the old gentleman was away for the day.

"Perhaps you can tell me what I am most anxious to know?" said the stranger. "Is there a young girl named Nelly or Helen living with Mr. Dick?"

"My sister?" demanded the boy, turning alternately red and white.

"Well," hesitated the lady, "I have a revelation to make to you and her. I am sorry to disturb your relationship, but she is not your sister!"

"No?" he said, as though bewildered, for the bright spot in his life had been her sisterly love. "You ain't joking, are you, ma'am?"

After hesitating for a moment, his visitor observed:

"Of course you will feel hurt at first, but you must be brave. I have come to claim Nellie and to take her to a good home. In future she will be a lady, and you must forget her. Her name is Helen Raymond."

The tone was so cold, that Hi fired up, saying:

"Neither you nor anyone else will ever make me forget her. I don't believe what you say, a bit."

"I do not wish to discuss this matter with you," she said. "Where does your master live?"

"Mr. Dick lives up on the hill at the back of the city," sullenly answered the boy; then, quickly turning towards her, added: "You say that Nelly isn't my sister. I'd like you to prove it."

"Listen to me," quietly returned the lady. "Some years ago I was very poor and, with my husband, was

preparing to go to California, our only obstacle being a baby girl, who could not accompany us across the plains; so, one night, I took her to the door of the New York Foundling Asylum, and, as I was about to place her in the basket, saw a man carrying a baby boy, on which I spoke to him, and he told me that the child in his arms was named Hiram Hildreth, and was no relation of his, the little one's parents having died of cholera."

"Then I'm nobody," angrily burst out Hi.

"You have no friends," she coldly answered.

"Go on," he said. "I see what sort of a woman you are."

"You're a very rude boy," observed Mrs. Raymond. "I suppose you feel bad because Nelly is not your sister? I hope she is better behaved than you are."

"Nelly," he cried, "you best believe she is good. I tell you she's a beautiful girl;" then, seeing his visitor was about leave, he placed his hand on her arm, saying, in a lower tone: "Tell me all about it, ma'am; I want to know the worst."

"I gave the man five dollars to place you and Nelly together in the basket," she quietly continued. "I saw the sister take you both out, and listened while she read your names, which she did from two cards—Nelly! Hiram Hildreth!"

"And that's the real truth?" passionately demanded the boy.

"Yes, that is what occurred! I have all the proofs with me and authority to demand custody of my girl!"

"You're a nice mother, you are!" burst out Hi. "I wonder you have the face to come here and say what you do! Why haven't you claimed her before—why have you let us always think we were brother and sister?"

"I cannot go into that!" said Mrs. Raymond, red-denning. "All I can tell you being this. I am now rich and wish to educate and bring up Nelly as a lady!" saying which she withdrew and, entering the carriage, drove off to call upon her daughter, leaving Hi angry, stunned and crushed with the first real trouble he had known.

"Nelly not my sister!" he ejaculated. "Now I don't care whether school keeps or not!"

"Sody!" shouted a man at the fountain, arousing him from his reverie. "Say, are you asleep, Hi?"

He served the customer with very bad grace, then, seating himself, murmured his oft-repeated wish: "Oh, if I were only my own master!"

At supper time a neighbor, full of "Nell's good luck," brought him his meal, but he sat silently thinking and would not reply to her chatter, so she went off and told folks that he was mad at the girl's good fortune, which was untrue, as he loved Nelly better than all else in the world.

When closing-time came he locked up the store and walked slowly homeward, thinking:

"It's all against me! I am an orphan—not worth a cent. Now she'll be rich and won't care for me any more. No, Nell ain't that sort; but the woman is a hard-hearted creature—the idea of her leaving Nelly here all these years! Well, I'll go in and see her."

Hi found the visitor in the best parlor, deeply engrossed in conversation with Nelly and Mr. and Mrs. Dick.

"This is our Hiram," said the old gentleman to Mrs. Raymond. "You saw him at the store, did you not?"

She bowed and said "yes," but did not take any further notice of him, which, coupled with her arm about his "sister," made the boy boil over with rage.

"I want to speak with you, Hi," said Nelly, rising; "excuse me for a little while, mother?" then led the way into the kitchen, and waiting until the lad entered, closed the door, saying: "What is the matter, brother?"

"Nothing," he replied, seating himself by an open window. "What does it matter to you that we ain't relations—you cotton to the woman right away."

"She is my mother," gently returned the girl, going close to him and leaning upon the back of his chair. "It is my duty to be kind to her, but do you imagine that it will make any difference in my love for you?"

Hiram was mad, so, instead of answering properly, he growled:

"Oh, it's the money makes you like her. I'm poor, you'll soon forget me."

"Hi!" she said, in a firm voice, "take that back—you know it ain't so?" but he was angry, so he refused, and began to whistle as though he did not care anyhow.

"I'll give you one more chance, brother?" she continued. "I can truly say, I love you better than any one else, better probably than I ever shall any other person! I know you mean well, Hi, and there's a good big heart in you, but you cannot control your temper, and if you ever want to be anything to me, you must be master of yourself, I have no more to say!"

This stung him.

"Anything to you?" he murmured. "What do you mean?" "I mean," she answered, blushing to the roots of her hair, "that if you care for me a bit, you'll try and do better!" but she, without intending to deceive, did not mean that, yet scarcely knew how to give her thoughts shape; however, Hi understood her, and, rising, took her hands, saying: "Nelly—I have always loved you—now you're going away, will you sometimes think of me? Will you promise that you will not forget me?"

"Yes!" she replied, in a low voice, then resting her head on his shoulder, pleaded: "Oh, Hi! Try and be less bad-tempered, think of me when you have one of your ugly fits on you—folks won't always bend to you, dear! You will, won't you? I shall look forward to the time when we shall meet again, when you are master of yourself!"

Hi promised.

CHAPTER V.

HI OBTAINS WHAT HE DESIRES.

THE next day Nelly and Mrs. Raymond quitted the druggist's house and Hiram set to work diligently, doing his best, but it was the same old routine, and somehow he chafed under it; still he worked on, and looked for letters from Nelly as his rewards.

Month after month passed, and her communications became less and less frequent, and finally ceased; then, in the following spring he received a note from Mrs. Raymond which made him almost frantic with rage, the communication running thus:

"MR. HIRAM HILDRETH—Sir: I enclose a cutting from an English paper published here. You will, I think, understand why you have not heard and will not hear any more from the daughter of

"Yours faithfully,

"HENRIETTE RAYMOND.

"Florence, Italy, March 30th, 187—."

The cutting referred to read:

"Miss Helen Raymond, the beautiful daughter of the wealthy American lady, Mrs. Raymond, who has so long been engaged to Count Roberto Doria, will be married to the latter nobleman on the 15th of April."

Hi perused this several times, then his face clouded, and tearing the note into fragments, he hissed:

"It's all that woman's doings. Poor Nelly!" after which he went down to the store.

He had grown careless of late, and had several times given Mr. Dick trouble, now he felt reckless.

"I'm sixteen," he cried, as he surveyed himself in the looking-glass. "I don't see why I should be tied down here."

In a short time Mr. Dick entered, and seeing some cases still unpacked in the middle of the store, gently remonstrated with him, saying:

"I asked you to attend to those the first thing."

His heart was full of bitterness, so he seized the opening tools and savagely attacking one of the cases, began to split it open, when his grip on the hammer slipped and he sent it flying through the plate glass window of the store.

This aroused even Mr. Dick, and sharp words passed between them.

Had the old gentleman known of the letter he would probably have simply expostulated with the boy; as it was he severely reprimanded him.

All Hiram's fancied injuries crowded into the lad's inflamed mind and he forgot himself, as he often had done; being, when angry, entirely indifferent to what he said.

Dashing the nail-drawer, which he had retained in his hand, on to the floor, he asked Mr. Dick to release him from his indentures, vowing never to do another hand's turn in the place.

"You're an ungrateful boy!" hotly observed the old man. "I have done my best to bring you up and this is my return. Go!"

"I'm going!" growled Hi. "I shall be my own master now!"

Spite of his mortification, Mr. Dick could scarcely refrain from smiling, then, staying the lad, said:

"See here, Hiram boy, you don't go off like that. Wait until the sun is down then I'll talk to you. I must do something to start you in the world." But Hi would not listen to him and, seizing his hat, rushed off, saying:

"I've had enough of you."

Going to the house, he hastily packed his clothes, and was preparing to leave the place, when Mrs. Dick tapped on the door of his room, inquiring:

"Can I speak to you, Hiram?"

"Come," he cried, whereupon she entered, and seeing his bundle, demanded:

"What new trouble is this?"

"Nothing," he sullenly answered; "only I'm going away."

"To do what?" she asked, for she was very fond of him. "Hiram, have you quarreled with Mr. Dick?"

"I am free now," he said, evading a direct reply.

"I'm going to seek my fortune—going to be my own master."

Taking a little roll of bills from her purse, she gently observed:

"You have no money, my son; accept this from me, and remember, whenever you feel that you have had a good home here, and would like to return, come back."

"That will be never," he quietly answered, for he did not like to hurt her feelings; she had always been very good to him, then, pretending not to see the money, shook hands with her and quitted the place where he had been reared.

As he mounted the hillside on his way to Mrs. Birdie's house, he turned and glanced back at his old home, saying:

"Good-bye—I hate you! I am now my own master—free!" then resumed his climbing.

Birdie was at home, lying on his back upon a dirty mattress, smoking like a factory chimney.

"Well, Bub," he cried, "what news?"

Ever since the accident the boys had been great friends, and Hi had come to look upon the vagabond as a very smart fellow.

Returning his salute, he told him that he had "cut Dick's," adding:

"Now, I'm ready for the road! Where shall we go?"

"You know Spearman, the horse-dealer?" demanded Birdie.

"Yes," nodded Hi. "What of him?"

"Well, he's got some horses he wants taken to Hoosick Falls," drawled the other. "Go and offer to do the job, but, see here, don't tell him that I'm going to be your pal."

"All right," answered our young friend. "But why don't you want me to tell him?"

"Well, you see!" chuckled Birdie, "he ain't no friend of mine—he's treated me pretty much as old Dick has—you understand?"

"I see!" said Hi. Then away he went, down the hill again, and was presently at Spearman's horse sales-room, where he found the proprietor, a big, fat, clean-shaven man.

Stating his business, he asked:

"I'll take good care of the horses, sir, and will deliver them safely."

"How much do you want?" demanded the man.

"A dollar!" said the boy.

"I'll give you two if you'll find another chap to help you!" returned Spearman. "You must be here at sunrise, and travel all day, so as to reach Hbosick Falls late at night. I'll leave word with my men, and will go on by rail, this evening, as I have business there!" then, turning quickly on him, demanded. "But why did you leave Mr. Dick's?"

"Well," said Hi, in a confused manner, "the fact is we couldn't hit it together, so he gave me my freedom, and now I'm my own boss."

"You're a blamed young fool!" bluntly observed Spearman. "You'll often wish yourself back again, I can tell you!"

Hi felt half inclined to retort that it was no business of Spearman's, anyhow, but swallowed his anger, and, promising to be round at the stable by five o'clock the next morning, proceeded homeward; that is to Mrs. Bird's shanty, where he reported progress.

It seemed strange to be in Whitehall and not to take his supper in Mrs. Dick's clean kitchen, while the meal, as served by Mrs. Bird, was poor in quality and of suspicious purity.

As they retired to sleep on the mattress that served Birdie as "a couch by day," Hi noticed that his bundle had been opened.

"I did it," carelessly remarked his chum. "See here, sonny, I want you to lend me your spare suit? You will, won't you?"

"I don't think it will fit you," faltered Hi.

"Oh, yee, it will!" grinned Birdie; "I've tried it on. We're going to be chums, you know, and share everything."

"Very well," grunted our hero, but he did not like it, however, he knew that it was useless for him to show his temper to Birdie.

At daybreak the next morning he arose unrefreshed, from the insect-haunted couch, and glancing out of the window, exclaimed:

"My gracious, how it rains!"

CHAPTER VI.

FALLING OUT WITH A PARTNER.

"RAINS?" drowsily observed Birdie; "then we won't go."

"But we must," said Hi. "Mr. Spearman expects us to take those horses, and we've got to do it."

"Oh, shoo!" cried his companion. "Ain't we nice and snug here?"

"Snug!" echoed Hi, shuddering at his night's experience. "I haven't slept a wink!"

"Well, if I must I must!" yawned the other. "How many horses are there, hey?" with which he deliberately opened our hero's bundle and, turning over its contents, laughingly remarked: "Here's a nice collection for a junk store," then proceeded to dress himself in Hi's best garments.

Somehow, instead of getting red-hot, our young friend tried to smother his temper. The fact was, he relied considerably upon Birdie, whom he knew had been out in the world; besides, having agreed to share alike, a matter about which they had so often talked, he did not like to back out, though it was gall and wormwood to him to see Birdie in his clothes.

Making a miserable breakfast off cold pie and water, they started out in the rain, Hi taking good care to carry his own bundle, in which were some stockings and undergarments.

Everything was quiet at the stables, and the boys were obliged to turn out the man in charge, who presently handed over twenty-four horses to them; the animals being roped in two lines.

"You'll ride on the leaders, fellers," sleepily observed the groom, "and you'll take the new road. You, Hi, keep well ahead with your gang, and don't let the two lots get together, as they are ugly and may fight." Then, handing Hi some money for tolls, returned to his bed, leaving the lads to start out in the pelting rain.

Turning up the collar of his coat and pulling down the brim of his hat, Hi secured his bundle to his waist then set his team in motion.

As they passed the drug-store, he saw a light burning in it, and noticed Mr. Dick, who was compounding a prescription; the old gentleman had also been roused out early.

Hi would have given something, had he possessed it, to have sunk into the ground out of his late employer's sight; but, just then, Birdie having ridden up alongside him, his animals began to plunge and rear.

"Go back behind, you mutton-head!" he yelled, turning to his companion. "Don't you remember what the man said?"

Hearing the noise—for the horses on both lines were rearing, neighing and snorting—Mr. Dick walked to the door of his store, and glancing up beheld his protégé, who, by that time, was purple with rage and rating Birdie ferociously, while the latter, also furious, was slanging him back in a style before which Hi's was milk to vitriol.

It was a little triumph for the druggist, but he was too good a man to laugh, so contented himself with quietly watching.

For some time the boys had all they could do to separate the animals, which bit, whinnied and fought like wild creatures. However, finally, they contrived to part them, when Birdie shouted to his chum:

"See here, Hi! You called me a mutton-head, didn't yer?"

"What about it?" growled the other, lashing his horse into a trot, glad to get away from the vicinity of the drug-store; "what about it—eh?"

"Well, you'll see!" bawled Birdie.

On they went, heading for Hoosick Falls and keeping apart until noon, when the rain abated, and Hi, who had purchased some food by the wayside, tied up his leader and returned a little distance with the idea of offering his companion some grub.

He was not in a particularly amiable temper, but his mood was angelic to that of Birdie.

As he sighted the latter he seated himself and opening the paper bag, which contained beef sandwiches, made two piles of them, when his chum cantered up and hastily secured his horse and, after seeing that the leading rope was free between each animal, strode towards Hi and, letting drive with his right, caught him a bung on the nose, then dancing before him, cried:

"Called me mutton-head, did yer?"

Hi picked himself up and, sternly regarding his opponent, drew off his soaking coat and attacked Birdie like a little man.

They gave each other a sound drubbing, trampling over the nice sandwiches and their discarded clothes in a most animated and energetic fashion.

There was not much science exhibited, but the boys were spunky, and the blows knocked a good deal of bad blood out of both of them.

At length Hi landed his antagonist in a sitting position, in a ditch, then grabbing him by the ear lugged him out, and made a chair of him, after which he paused in order to regain breath.

"Do you call this the way ter treat a pal?" groaned Birdie, who did not relish being sat upon, and whose position was anything but comfortable.

"Never mind," panted Hi. "Have you had enough?"

"Will you own I'm your conqueror?"

"Derned if I will!" resolutely answered the other.

Hi rose very angry, and pointing to his chum's pants and vest, said:

"Take them off! They're mine—take 'em off!"

"How?" demanded the boy, sitting up.

"Take them clothes off!" once more observed the other. "I see what sort of a feller you are! Look at my best coat—in the mud there?"

"See here," said Birdie; "I ain't got no shift to put on in place of this. I can't go on to Hoosick Falls with out clothes, can I?"

"Of course not," returned Hi, smiling in spite of himself, adding: "I had some sandwiches here a little while ago."

"Oh, here they are—bits of 'em," chuckled Birdie, serching among the grass, and chewing at the fragments. "Beef!"

"How can you eat such muddy things?" inquired Hi.

"You'll get used to it afore yer sees Whitehall agin," said his pal. "I tell you I've been sometimes glad to eat anything."

Hi did not reply, saying:

"You never told me about that," but he thought so, and made up his mind to get rid of his companion, who, when he had secured all the fragments of the sandwiches, asked:

"Where did yer leave yer horses?"

"In the next bend of the road," said Hi. "Guess I'll go forward and start again," with which he threw his soggy coat and bundle over his shoulder and went ahead.

In a little while he returned, shouting:

"They're gone, they're gone!"

"Gone?" echoed Birdie. "Well, you're in for it, Hi. Guess they've been run off by gypsies; there's a lot of them fellers camping in these parts."

"Well, we've got to find them," said Hi. "It's no use stopping here. I've agreed to deliver them to Mr. Spearman, and I'm going to do it," with which he mounted one of Birdie's horses.

As they rode on, the sun shone out and his companion, who had completely regained his good temper, shouted to him:

"Ain't this bully, Hi—beats the old drug store, hey?" but Hiram did not reply.

He would have felt even more sold, had he known that at the very moment his pal spoke, the footman was handing Mr. Dick a letter addressed:

"MR. HIRAM HILDRETH,

In care of Mr. Dick. Whitehall, New York."

As it was, he kept his thoughts to himself and rode on, determined to take things as they came, for was he not his own master?

CHAPTER VII.

A VERY THRILLING ADVENTURE.

We left Hi and Birdie searching for the leading lot of horses which had been mysteriously spirited away by some one.

"I'm sure it's gypsies," once more remarked Birdie, as, after riding some distance, they failed to discover the missing animals. "They'll dock 'em mid dye 'em, and trade 'em off before night. I know 'em—you'll never see the horses again."

After riding awhile they came to a farm-house, and, on seeing the owner of the place and relating their plight, were allowed to leave their animals in the barn-yard while they returned and hunted for the missing ones.

Walking back to that part of the road where the steeds had vanished, the lads began to track the hoof-marks, and soon found that they ended in a low swamp.

"Come on," cried Hi, boldly entering the reedy soaked ground. "What are you hanging back for?"

"I don't see any force in getting my head mashed by a lot of gypsies," argued Birdie. "Les' go on to

Hoosick Falls, and tell old Spearman that the hosses are lost."

Hi, who was already up to his ankles in the bog, turned, came back to his chum, and, placing his face close to Birdie's, snorted:

"See here, you'd best come, eh?"

"What for?" drawled the other, retreating a pace or two, for Hi breathed savagely.

"Them hosses has to be found," snapped our hero, following him up. "Unstan', Birdie, them hosses has to be found."

Again his companion backed: there was something about Hi's manner he did not like, an implied threat, and, as he had already fought him once that morning, he was not anxious for any more of the fun, so he murmured:

"Of course, pal, you go and find 'em—my—my—boots ain't particular good."

Hi was as mad as a hornet, so, grabbing Birdie, he dragged him along until they were fairly in the mire, when the lazy fellow agreed to walk, saying:

"It ain't no kinder use to go trapesing after them animals, but, to oblige you, I'll try it."

On they waded, right up to their knees, and presently saw a clearly-defined road rising from the morass and extending for a long way into the woods.

As they emerged from the mud and regained dry land, Hi pointed to the miry hoof-marks, saying:

"I was right, you see. We'll soon come across them."

"Why, I know this place," remarked Birdie. "It's Simon Lee's camping ground. A lot you'll see of them hosses."

"If you say that again, I'll leather you," angrily replied Hi. "Now, you just drop it and show me where Lee lives."

Chuckling, as though amused with his companion's ill temper, Birdie sauntered along, and presently, turning to the right, over a corduroy bridge, led the way until they reached an open space, dotted with canvas-covered tents, when, halting, he whispered:

"It's awful queer—nobody seems about."

By that time it was high noon, and the woods were as hot as an oven.

Advancing, followed by his pal, who stuck to his heels like a trained dog does to its master, Hi peeped into tent after tent, but all seemed deserted—even the curs being absent.

Only one shelter, a big affair, decorated with a scarlet curtain, remained unvisited; so Hi, after assuring himself that the others were entirely empty, moved quietly towards it, and was about to raise the blanket, when they heard a low moan, followed by the growl of a dog.

"Come away," breathed Birdie. "That's Simon Lee's tent. He's in there," with which he turned and moved rapidly away from the spot.

Without heeding him, Hi peeped in and beheld a sight that made him start back with horror.

Lying dead, with a knife buried in his heart, was a fine, handsome young man of twenty, while across his body lay an ancient-looking, bearded gipsy, also mortally wounded, but who was still conscious.

As Hi entered, an aged hound, crouched near the old man, gave vent to a low growl and endeavored to rise, but failing, glared at our hero and snarled like a tigress.

"Who are you?" faintly demanded the wounded man.

"I am Hiram Hildreth, your friend," boldly answered the boy. "Who has done this awful deed?"

"My enemy," said Simon Lee, then pausing, half turned to Hi, and murmured: "Hiram Hildreth, that's singular. Did you say that your name is Hiram Hildreth?"

"I did," replied the lad, "I was adopted out of a foundling institution."

"Boy," said the venerable gipsy, "give me your hand. Do not fear, I will not hurt you."

Complying, Hiram gazed first on the face of the dying man and then upon the dog, which was watching him with half-closed, glazed eyes.

"You will swear, before your Creator, that your name is Hiram Hildreth?" said the gipsy.

"I will," he said.

"Listen," continued Simon, speaking faintly and slowly. "Fifteen years ago, I was a bad fellow—a thief, anything that paid—a man came to my camp, in Westchester County, New York, and handed a baby to me said: 'Put this child out of the way and I'll give you a thousand dollars!' I agreed—never meaning to kill you—!"

"Me!" cried Hi.

"Ye—yes!" gasped Simon. "You—I've been—looking for you for this—last five years."

"What was this man's name who wanted to kill me?" excitedly demanded the lad.

"I don't know!" faintly replied the gipsy. "Give me some brandy, it's—it's in that bottle!" pointing to a curious, squat vessel, placed on a trunk near by.

The boy poured out some of the liquid into a cup and administered it to the dying man, who presently revived somewhat, informed him that instead of doing as the mysterious stranger required, he had carried the babe to the New York Foundling Institution, and given him the name of a celebrated gipsy, Hiram Hildreth; that as he was about to place him in the basket, he noticed a lady who paid him to take her child and deposited her with his burden, passing them off as brother and sister; the recital deeply interested our hero, who longed to cross-examine the narrator.

Little by little, for he was sinking fast, Simon described how he had received the money and sworn that he had put the child away—how the mysterious person had lately visited him and taunted him with being false, whereupon he, Simon, had laughed in his face, and acknowledged his trick. All this took a long while to tell, for the gipsy was repeatedly compelled to stop and think; but, finally, he ended by saying:

"Early this morning, in the pouring rain, he suddenly appeared in my tent, and, before I could raise an alarm, attacked and overpowered me, while my son, awakening to my aid, was stabbed to the heart by him, after which the wretch escaped. When my people discovered me, they started out in pursuit, and that is why my camp is deserted."

Having related this, he sighed heavily and gasped:

"Pray for me, boy!"

Then sinking, with his arms about his son, breathed his last.

For some moments Hi knelt and silently prayed, then rising, stole out of the tent and left the bodies to the care of the faithful old hound.

Sick at heart, for he now knew that he had a bitter, secret enemy, he began to pace to and fro before the canvas and blanket structure, when Birdie came tiptoeing back, saying:

"Here they come, Hi, and the horses with them."

CHAPTER VIII.

A NIGHT AMONG THE GIPSIES.

BIRDIE was right, and soon they beheld a motley cavalcade, composed of gipsy men, women and children, riding towards them, among the horses being their own twelve.

Ahead of the party, mounted upon a cold-black steed, came Absalom Lee, the dead man's eldest son, who, on noticing Hiram, reined in his animal and demanded, in a surly voice:

"What are you doing here?"

"I came for my horses!" boldly answered the boy.

"What do you mean by running off with them, eh?"

"Silence!" growled the man, dismounting and moving towards the tent. "We required them to chase a murderer?"

"Have you caught him?" cried Hi, following the gipsy.

"No!" said the latter, with an oath. "He escaped, but we'll get him yet—never fear!" then, lifting the red blanket, entered the tent and uncovering his head surveyed the body of his parent.

He was a big, rough-looking horse-thief, a vagabond wanderer on the face of the earth, but he had a heart and loved the old man who had been both father and chief to him. Now Absalom was head of the tribe, but at what a cost?

Kneeling by the silent forms he kissed first the old man and then the young one, after which he rose and drawing his knife slashed the tent all round until it hung in strips, and, having done this, turned the fragments back, crying:

"See your dead chief, my children, murdered by that unknown fiend!"

As he uttered these words the crowd pressed forward and encircled the spot, forcing Hi, against his will, to witness the final ceremony.

Placing his hand upon his heart, Absalom stood erect and addressed his tribe, making them all swear to avenge Simon's death, then, one by one, they passed the bodies, each touching and saluting them as they went by.

The sun was setting as the last gipsy bade farewell to his late leader, and when the men had paid their respects, the women took charge of the body and prepared it for the grave.

There was something fascinating in their wild ceremonies, which, mingled with the fact that Simon had been, as it were, mixed up with the mystery of Hi's life, kept the boy on the spot, while Birdie, who seemed to know all the tribe, watched the proceedings, and smoked like a peat fire.

Spearman, and his anxiety about his horses, was forgotten by our hero, and for several hours he was entirely absorbed with the mysterious rites.

It was midnight ere the bodies were conveyed to the grave which had been dug at the foot of a young oak.

Simon and his son were placed side by side in the excavation, then every one present advanced and, saluting the bodies, said something in the Romany tongue, after which Absalom proclaimed himself chief, and with his own hands, began the work of filling in the grave; then the entire crowd joined him and in a little while the hand piled earth rose above the spot, sods were placed on it and all was over.

None of the gipsies seemed inclined to sleep but sat about in groups smoking and talking over the mysterious death of their old leader, little imagining that the immediate cause of his taking off was among them in the presence of the boy Hiram.

Fortunately he did not give his name, and Simon having hinted that no one but his dead son had ever shared his secret, Hi was wise enough to keep his discovery to himself.

Birdie was fast asleep under one of the tents but there was no rest for Hi who suddenly remembered that he ought to be in Hoosick Falls. So striding up to Absalom, he said:

"Say, mister, have you done with my horses?"

"What horses?" demanded the gipsy, who was with all hands drinking in honor of his elevation to the chieftainship of the tribe.

"I don't know anything about your horses—who are you?"

Hiram thought this tolerably cool, so he got mad and, in his usual impetuous way, gave the chief a bit of his mind, saying:

"If you think you're going to bounce me out of them horses, you're mistaken, mister?"

Absalom glanced at him contemptuously, then returned:

"Who are you, my young bantam?"

"I'm one of the boys engaged by Spearman to take a drove of animals from Whitehall to Hoosick," cried the angry lad. "I want the horses, and you'd best let me have them without any fuss."

Absalom laughed derisively, which caused the lad to

curl worse than ever, then, addressing one of his men, asked:

"What is this cub yapping about?"

"He means them horses we found this morning, when we wanted more mounts," answered the gipsy. "They're a nice lot, and you might make a trade with them."

"I can't trade," said Hi, "they ain't mine."

"That don't matter," remarked Absalom. "See here, boy—join us, and live a free life. I like your cheek."

"I must say I like yours," said the lad, smiling in spite of himself. "I must say you've got your share. Why, those horses are old Spearman's."

"What about it?" surly demanded the chief. "I own them now. Gipsy law says possession is everything. I've got them—they're mine."

"Why, good gracious!" shouted Hi, fairly beside himself, "one would think you were the President! You forget that you're in the United States. See here, you just hand them horses over to me, will you?"

"Not much," angrily returned the gipsy, saying which he motioned to his men to drive the lad away, which they did.

Hi was boiling over with rage; but they only laughed at him, and said that Absalom would never give up the animals.

"Where's my pal?" asked the boy.

"In our tent, asleep," said one of the women. "Go and lie down by him. He's agreed to join us and give up the horses."

Hiram thought awhile; then, finding that he had only lost ground by exhibiting temper, followed the woman, and, stretching himself by Birdie's side, pretended to sleep.

Hi had observed that men, women and children were drinking pretty freely, so determined to wait awhile, then wake Birdie, and attempt to run off with the animals.

He noticed that the gipsies were closely guarding them, and knew it would require great caution to carry out his plan.

For two hours the gang drank and talked, until they were all as stupid as owls, after which they threw themselves down any where, a number of the young men sleeping among the horses.

"Birdie," whispered Hi in his chum's ear, "get up."

"Low," grunted the other. "I want to stay here; it's lovely."

"Get up," said our hero. "Now or never is our time. We can save Spearman's property."

"Oh, it ain't worth trying for," murmured Birdie.

"What's the use of having yer head split open fur nothing?"

"You come right along," breathed Hi, pulling his pal's ear. "The dogs are all quiet, and if we don't clear out now we miss our chance."

Birdie rose, and they surveyed the scene.

Absalom was lying, drunk, upon his father's grave, and not a soul was stirring.

Hanging from a tree was a quarter of a horse, under which the dogs were eagerly watching.

Rising, the boys stole towards the place; then, opening their knives, sliced at the meat, throwing huge lumps to the hungry curs, each of which, seizing a mass, immediately made off to the woods.

"Now, Birdie," whispered Hiram, "come along, and as we secure the horses, fasten them behind the other in a long string, I riding the first horse, you the last."

Cautiously moving among the sleeping men, they, after many narrow escapes, succeeded in collecting Spearman's animals.

As they knotted the leading ropes, Absalom awoke, and sitting up stared at them, then fell back asleep.

"Now mount—arrevol!" hoarsely whispered Hi, to his pal. "Take a switch and keep the horses at full speed."

The gray morning light just enabled them to see clearly, and soon they were in motion.

Presently first one dog and then another quitted its food, and came yapping after them, and soon they had the whole pack in full cry at their heels.

"Dern the cusses!" growled Birdie, as the dogs made dashes at his feet, while the horses, scared and angry, lashed out right and left.

"Whip 'em!" yelled Hi, plying his switch, and away went the train, over the corduroy bridge, and along the forest road; plunging into the morass, and regaining the highway like a lot of hunters.

"Keep it up! Keep it up, you duffer!" bawled our hero, as his chum slackened his exertions. "The gipsies are after us, sure's a gun. I can hear them shouting!"

CHAPTER IX.

AN EXCITING CHASE AND TERRIBLE STORM.

THE horses galloped along the main road, and in due time the boys arrived at the farm, where they had left the second string of animals.

Hastily informing the farmer of Simon's death, they secured their other charges, then, bidding the man a hurried adieu, started for Hoosick Falls.

It was a warm, yet threatening morning, and a dark cloud was working up from the southeast.

On they went, lashing at their animals, and keeping up a tremendous rate of speed.

"The storm will overtake us," shouted Birdie, pointing to the cloud.

"I don't care for that," bawled Hi; "never mind the storm, look out for the gipsies."

Finding they could not gain on them by following the road, part of the gang, under Absalom's direction, had made a short cut through the pine-woods and were awaiting the boys at a place called Burnt-tree Hill, a lightning-scathed mountain ridge covered with charred trees.

On pressed the lads until they reached the bottom of this hill, when the storm broke upon them and their

horses, wild with fright, dashed madly up the road and into the ambuscade of gipsies who were halted on each side of the way; at the same time a tremendous blinding that lighted up the scene and striking the trees to their right, went gliding in a hundred forks like a net of fire into the valley. Hi and Birdie were side by side, their horses being too much scared to quarrel.

"Give it to 'em!" cried our hero, lashing his animal like fury, but Birdie was frightened and soon they were surrounded by the angry gipsies.

A tremendous peal of thunder echoed from peak to peak, then died away, and when he could be heard, Absalom said:

"Come, give up them horses, quietly, and return with us!"

"See you hanged first!" said Hiram, while Birdie sat irresolute and seemed half inclined to yield.

"At 'em, Romany lads!" cried Absalom, and soon the boys were struggling, each, being attacked by a stalwart gipsy.

As they were dragged from their horses, a blinding sheet of lightning seemed to envelop the entire party; and when the thunder, that immediately succeeded, had died away the lads found themselves free, while the gipsies were lying, stunned, to the right and left.

With nervous energy they forced their trembling horses to start and were presently descending the hill, pell-mell, some of the animals galloping sideways and others backing at a tremendous rate.

Reining in and getting the teams into something like order, they, in a few moments, succeeded in starting regularly, while the lightning darted hither and thither and the thunder sounded like a battery of mortars.

Birdie had lost his hat and was wildly telegraphing to Hi to stop, but the latter, tossing aside his bundle, to show his intention of getting on anyhow, neck or nothing, signaled "go ahead," so he urged his horse at the top of its speed; meanwhile the gipsies were scrambling to their feet and surrounding Absalom, who was breathing heavily.

The delay gave the boys time to put half a mile between themselves and pursuers, and, by the time the latter had tended their chief and stunned horses, Hi and Birdie had increased the distance to a full mile.

As the lads dashed on, they encountered a poor pedler, moaning and helpless, buried under a wagon that had been overturned upon him; while his horse was lying dead in its tracks, killed by the lightning.

"Stop!" cried Hi, in a voice above the noise of the distant thunder. "We must help this man."

"It's only Moses Rosenberg!" bawled Birdie. "He's a Jew," but his chum jerked the speaker's horse back upon its haunches and compelled him to dismount, though they could see Absalom and a number of his gang riding down the road behind them.

Hastily extricating the poor fellow from his painful position they helped him to his feet, then, briefly informing him of their danger, were remounting, when he said:

"One moment—have you any weapons?"

"No," said Hi.

Scrambling into the prostrate wagon he presently returned with two loaded revolvers and a rifle; handing the latter to Hi and one of the former to Birdie.

Placing their horses at a distance they secured them, then ran back and hid behind the pedler's wagon.

In a few minutes up came Absalom, savage and determined to regain the animals, whereupon Hi leveled his rifle at him and Birdie and the man presented their revolvers, our hero saying:

"Go back, my friends, go back."

The gipsies were unarmed, they seldom carrying any other weapons than knives or sticks and, not deeming the boys worth powder and ball, had left their pistols behind them.

"I want them horses," doggedly replied the chief.

"Go back," quietly remarked Hi.

Giving a signal to his gang, the gipsy flourished his bludgeon and charged with his men, at the same time uttering the tribe cry of:

"The nather-ach!" (at them, boys).

Taking good aim Hi fired, the pedler and Birdie doing the same, whereupon, wounded and bleeding, the gang recoiled, leaving Absalom, who had fallen off his horse and was lying groaning on the wagon tilt.

"Do you want any more?" demanded Hi, reloading.

"We're ready for you."

The fellows said they only wished to remove their chief, which Hi agreed to, after which they rode off bearing away Absalom, who was badly though not seriously wounded.

"My horse is dead," observed the pedler. "Lend me one of your animals."

"Harness the last horse of your team Birdie, and let the rest help draw," suggested Hi. "Those gipsies will give us more trouble."

The wagon was righted and Birdie's team hitched, then Hi secured his hind horse to the dead animal and dragged it out of the road, and, that done they once more started; the rain coming down like a waterfall.

As they anticipated, the gipsies cut them off at a bend of the road, but Hi let fly with his revolver and the pedler and Birdie took pot shots, as they dashed by them in the blinding downpour; after which the gang gave up the chase.

When they arrived on the outskirts of Hoosick Falls, Rosenberg put up at a friend's, and on parting from the boys, said:

"My lads, I am not rich for I have many to keep, but here are twenty-five dollars. Were my horse not dead I would treble it. You must keep the money, Hiram; but for you I should have been robbed by the gipsies."

Hi thanked him and they drove off, Birdie saying:

"He ain't a bad sort though he is a Jew."

"Jew!" indignantly replied Hi, "I tell you, the

Jews are just splendid folks to deal with, they're a sight homester than some Christians."

"That snut Birdie up; Hi hated to hear anyone despised on account of his faith."

"Come, share the spondulix!" said Birdie.

"See here," urged his chum, "you owe me for that suit of clothes. If I give you half of this money you must let me keep what Spearman pays us?"

"Oh, come!" chuckled the scamp, "share and share alike, pal!"

"I tell you what," said Hi, "we'll leave it to Spearman."

"Plunk over half that sugar now, and I'm contented," grinned Birdie. "I know I've bested you a little, old chum, but that is a way I have."

Hi paid him half the amount, then they rode towards the hotel where Spearman was staying.

Birdie did not deserve any more money, as he had deliberately left Hi to fight it out with Absalom in the camp, and our hero had thoroughly made up his mind to part from him.

They rode slowly through the busy town, and presently reached the end of their destination, by which time the rain had ceased.

"Hi," whispered Birdie, pointing along the street "there he is."

"He—*who*?" demanded his companion.

"Spearman!" whispered the scamp. "I—excuse me—you tell him what we've done for him—I never did like that old horse-dealer. I once bested him."

CHAPTER X.

MORE MYSTERY, AND BIRDIE AGAIN TO THE FORE.

MR. SPEARMAN was seated in the veranda of the Logger's Arms Hotel, Hoosick Falls, waiting for the arrival of Hi and the horses.

The dealer was angry, but, instead of showing his temper, was chewing a straw and watching the road from Whitehall.

"Strange them animals don't come," observed a brother dealer, who was anxious to trade with him. "Who have you sent 'em by?"

"A boy I can depend on," replied Spearman. "Guess he's done his best," when, as he spoke, the two lots of horses came in sight, and the man saw that one of them was ridden by Birdie, whereupon he ejaculated: "Wonder where Hi Hildreth picked up with that tramp?"

Birdie was not at all anxious to meet Mr. Spearman, so, having delivered his horses to a stable hand, he dived out of sight, leaving Hi to tell his story, which he did without relating what he had learned from Simon, and that done, asked the dealer whether he thought Frank Bird deserved any more pay.

"Not a cent," replied Spearman. "He's bounced you out of a suit of clothes, and fooled you into the bargain. Of course he does not deserve any pay. Why, but for you, he might have permitted Absalom Lee to keep my horses, and, who knows, he may have arranged the matter of running them off before hand?"

"He ain't got brains enough," observed Hi.

"Well, here's ten dollars for you," said the man, opening his wallet and handing our hero a note, adding: "By the way, I've received a letter from Mr. Dick, enclosing one for you. He says, tell Hiram, boy, that I am willing to take him back, without a word of reproach, whenever he feels inclined to come, and that wife and I are sorry he's gone."

Hi took the letter addressed to him, but did not make any remark concerning Mr. Dick's message, so Spearman said:

"Ain't you had 'bout enough of it, Bubby? You are wet through, and what can a boy do in the world without friends or acquaintances?"

"I'm no man's nigger!" growled Hi. "I'm free now, and as for friends, well, guess I'll make some. Dick don't care for me—nobody does! I'm looking out for myself! See here, mister, before I'd take a cent from him, I'd starve—that's the sort of a boy I am. I've earned this ten dollars and another, and two fifty! I'll cut that loafer, Birdie's company, and fight my own way in the world. You can tell Mr. Dick that."

Spearman chuckled, for the ten dollar bill came from Mr. and Mrs. Dick, who had enclosed it to the horse-dealer.

"Here's three dollars odd, out of the toll money?" said the boy, as he turned to depart; with which he held the stamps out to the man.

"Keep 'em," replied the dealer; "you saved me from being robbed. If I was rich I'd reward you better. Say, Hi, follow my advice, and go home."

"No, sir," he cried, "No more Whitehall for Hi Hildreth;" then walked off, feeling as good as any man in the country.

At the corner of the block he encountered Birdie, who came smiling towards him, saying:

"Well—have you got our money, pal? Don't old Spearman say I'm to have half of what he paid you?"

"See here," said our hero; "I've had enough of you. I'll give you that suit of clothes, and you can git. I don't want any more of your company, you're a regular loafer, that's what you are. You didn't care whether Absalom kept the horses or not?"

"Well—I rather liked Ab," chuckled Birdie. "You're a fool, Hi, the gipsies are real nice folks," adding: "You ought to have stayed and become one of them."

"A thief?" flashed Hi.

"Come, don't get mad," smilingly answered his pal, winking knowingly, and nudging Hi with his elbow. "Pony up my dollar and let me go? Honor among thieves, you know."

Taking two silver halves out of his pocket, Hiram threw them on the sidewalk, observing:

"Now I've done with you. I'm sorry we ever joined each other."

"Good enough!" merrily returned Birdie. "I knew

you'd shell out. So long, pal, I'll join you again, later on."

"No you won't!" snapped Hi. "In future I'm on my own hook, and you must prey on some one else. You're a real mean thing, anyhow."

"See here, pard," calmly answered Birdie. "You're a little out of sorts now—ain't used to tramping."

"I'm no tramp!" cried Hi.

"Ain't yer?" chuckled his companion. "Well, if yer ain't, will yer kindly tell me what yer are?"

This staggered the boy, and as he could not deny it, he walked angrily away, murmuring:

"I may be a tramp, but I'm no thief, anyhow," then, entering a cheap hotel, ordered dinner, after which he opened the letter handed to him by Spearman, and read:

"NEW YORK, —, 187—.

MY DEAR HI: Unable any longer to bear Mrs. Raymond's bad treatment, she wishing to force me to marry a man I detested, I ran away from her, and am now here, in a situation, which I obtained this morning—am engaged by the housekeeper, the gentleman being away. Arrived from Italy by last steamer. Do not let Mr. or Mrs. Dick know of this. I am called Nelly Power here.

"Your affectionate sister.

"NELLY."

Address. No. —, Fifth Avenue.

Hi read this over and over again, then murmured:

"What can it mean? I don't believe that woman is Nelly's mother! I'll go to New York!" saying which he refolded the letter, placed it in the envelope and returned it to his pocket, then, after eating his dinner, asked to be shown to a room and retired.

Locking the door, he took off his still damp clothes and hung them up to dry, after which, securing his money under his pillow, he threw himself on to the bed, little imagining that Birdie had eaten in the same room as he had, and that the scamp had followed him to his sleeping apartment.

It was not long ere our hero was slumbering, and very soon afterwards Birdie's head appeared over the transom of the door which was open and unprovided with a glass window.

Silently, as an Indian, the fellow reversed his body and lowered himself into the room then, following Hi's example, removed his steaming clothes and cautiously took his place by his sleeping chum, murmuring:

"I saw you change a ten-dollar bill, my boy—the pedler gave you all ones. Half for poor Birdie, you know!" whereupon he began to fumble under the pillow, soon discovering the money, on which he observed:

"I don't know as it's much worth my while staying here. Hi evidently don't want my company, guess I'll gol" then, smiling, rose, dressed himself in Hiram's now dry garments, and unbolting the door, descended to the street, leaving his late partner without a cent with which to pay for breakfast.

Hi slept on, for he was dog-tired, and never awoke until the next morning, when he discovered his loss and began to raise Cain; the noise bring the landlord to his room.

"See here, mister!" he shouted; "this is a thieves' den—this is! I've been robbed!" but instead of replying the man summoned two rough-looking bullies, and, pointing to the indignant boy, drawled:

"Give him der gran' bounce!" and in two minutes more the lad found himself hoisted into the street.

His clothes were dry, but dusty and muddy; however, he did not mind this, and, knowing that Birdie had been the thief, began to inquire round, vowing, when he caught him, to break every bone in his body.

About noon he saw his late pal coming out of a low hotel, looking as seedy as a night-porter.

Advancing to him, he confronted him, saying:

"What do you mean by robbing me, you skunk?"

"Rob you?" sneered Bird, who had been gambling and had won. "What yer chinning about? I'm no skunk."

Hi peeled off his coat and was proceeding to, what he termed, "take his money out of Birdie's head," when the scamp threw two twenty dollar bills at him, crying:

"There's some stamps for you, now you just leave me alone. I don't want any truck with such trash as you are. I'm a gentleman—un'stan?"

"Trash?" yelled Hi, picking up the money, "I'll show you what sort of trash I am!" but the tramp would not fight, so Hiram was compelled to vent his anger in words.

Birdie listened, until his late pal was fairly out of breath, then, tossing Nelly's epistle on to the sidewalk, said, in a patronizing tone:

"Some mean thief stole my clothes and left yours in their place. That's your letter I believe!" adding "Hiram Hildreth, I'm ashamed of you, carrying on in that way. Now, take my advice—learn to master yourself!" with which he swaggered off down the street.

Hi picked up the letter, and, half vexed, half amused, murmured:

"Well that from you caps all. Blame your cool check."

CHAPTER XI.

A RAILWAY ACCIDENT AND ITS RESULT.

THE idea of Birdie giving him advice about mastering himself, was so comical to Hiram that, long after his late pal was out of sight, he continued to smile over it and say:

"Well you do beat all. I only wish you were honest, I'd like to keep right on with you, but there, I've had enough of your nonsense."

With all his faults Birdie was clever.

Starting for the depot, Hi arrived just as a train

bound for New York was moving out, whereupon he made a spring and landed safely by the brakeman, who growled somewhat at his proceeding, but grasped him by the arm and observed:

"You must be in a mighty hurry to get away, young feller."

Paying the conductor his fare, and seating himself on a vacant bench he watched the scenery mile after mile, and was composing himself for a dose, when he heard a strange signal from the engine and noticed the brakemen screwing down the brakes, presently feeling a tremendous shock, then the car reared on its back end, turned a somersault and rolled down a steep embankment, the next coach crashing on top of it and another and another falling on to them until they were completely hidden by the wrecks.

It was an awful time.

Passengers were crying, yelling, praying, moaning and cursing; some were jammed fast and others kept back by living barriers, while a few, like Hi, being uninjured, were able to crawl through the crushed, diamond-shaped interior of the car and to reach the front door, over which a cascade of hot water was pouring from the exploded boiler of the engine.

"Hold hard," cried our hero. "Keep back—bilin' water!"

But they pressed past him and emerged, scalded and agonized, on the bank.

In a moment or two the stream ceased, and Hiram prepared to escape.

As he was quitting the car, he heard a voice moaning:

"Oh, come back and help my boy—*do*."

Whereupon he turned and said:

"Who are you?—*where* are you?"

"Underneath this seat, and my boy is beneath me!" answered the voice.

Although he could hear the fire raging above him, Hi was too noble to knowingly desert anyone in trouble, so he groped his way and found that he could pull up the revolving back of the seat and thus liberate the person, who, raising a young boy, his companion, dragged himself after our brave Hiram.

"Quick!" cried the latter. "Give me the chap!" and taking the youth, who was bigger than himself, from the man, threw him over his shoulder, in another instant, was standing on the bank.

"Thank God!" said the stranger, as he reached Hi's side.

"Amen!" fervently ejaculated Hiram, but further remarks were cut short by the fire, which, burning down into the mass of cars and human beings, drove the survivors to seek another spot.

As they assisted the now partly conscious boy to scramble up the embankment, the flames burst out and scorched them, and they were glad enough when they reached the top and could bathe their necks and hands in cool water.

Turning from the sickening sight, Hi remembered that he had lost his ticket, so, on seeing the conductor, he told him of his trouble, whereupon the man gave him a pass.

In the confusion, our hero became separated from the gentleman and youth whom he had rescued, and, when a train from Hoosick came along, he jumped aboard and was soon once more speeding towards New York.

As they neared Albany he learned that the cause of the accident was a delayed freight train, and that over eighty people had perished in the disaster.

All along their route they were boarded by newspaper correspondents who plied them with questions and made Hi so angry that, finally, he said:

"See here, I ain't going to open my mouth any more and that's a fact! Just put down that I'm about played out—there!"

"What's your name?" demanded one of the reporters.

"I've got a long account about you—how you saved a gentleman and his son from being burnt in the wreck of the cars! Tell me, what is your name, sonny?"

Hi glanced suddenly at him, then said:

"Findout!"

"Findout?" queried the man. "What a peculiar name. I never heard of it before!"

The boy could not avoid smiling, but did not attempt to correct the mistake, so his name went down as "Findout."

On reaching New York, which they did by five o'clock the next morning, Hiram purchased a newspaper and in it read a long account of the accident, his bogus name being prominently mentioned.

"Wish I hadn't fooled the man!" he murmured.

"How old Mr. Dick would stare if he knew that I was the boy! Well, I'm having some awful adventures, I am; but, if I can only find Nelly, we'll get work somewhere together, and be as independent as grown-up folks. I wonder what she has to tell me?"

Just then, an undertaker's cart passed with a shell in it, and behind came a hack carriage, in which was seated the man whom our hero had rescued.

Hi watched them, until they were out of sight, then murmured:

"Guess the boy died on his way here. Poor fellow, he seemed terribly injured. The man looked at me, but didn't seem to know who I was." Saying which, he inquired his way to the address given him by Nelly, and was duly directed to cross to Fifth Avenue, and then turn up it to his right.

After walking awhile, he saw the undertaker's vehicle returning; so, hailing the man, he said:

"Whose body was that you were taking from the depot?"

Whereupon the driver, a surly fellow, growled:

"Find out!"

Remembering his own incivility, Hi could not refrain from smiling, and determined, from that time, never to give such a reply, but to try and be polite to everyone. Thinking which he moved onward.

On reaching the house where Nelly lived, he saw an undertaker's man putting crape upon the door-handle.

Little did he imagine that one moment before Nelly had hurriedly quitted the place, and rushing across the avenue, had vanished down the side street.

As Hi mounted the steps, an elderly woman came to the door and spoke to the undertaker, then said to our hero:

"Well?"

"Does Miss Nelly Power live here?" he demanded.

"She did," snapped the woman, "but she has gone off all in a huff. I can't talk to you now; come later if you want to see me."

"One moment," said the boy. "Who is dead here?"

"My employer's only son, a boy named Harry—he was killed in a railway accident, at least he died from the effects of the injuries he received."

"What is your employer's name?" inquired Hi.

"The Count Montalo," replied the woman.

"Is he a foreigner?" asked the lad.

"No, an American," she answered. "He has only lately come from Italy."

"You tell him that the boy who saved his life has called," said Hi. "So this Power girl has left?"

"Yes," nodded the woman. "When the count's sister arrived, just now, she caught sight of her, then came to me, excitedly, saying, 'I can't stop in this house, and, gathering her few things together, started,' adding: 'Do you know the girl?'"

"Well—I know of her. Tell the count I'll call in a few days," then walked away.

As he proceeded down the avenue, he turned and murmured:

"I wonder why Nelly ran off when she saw the count's sister; she had never met her before."

He walked down the long avenue until he came to Broadway, when he crossed to Sixth Avenue, then, turning to the right, began to slowly promenade towards Central Park.

At Fifty-ninth Street, just as he was entering the grounds, he spied Nelly in the distance.

"Hoy!" he cried, "Oh—Nelly! Oh—Nelly!"

The park police started and stared, but he ran on, and presently overtook her, still crying:

"Nelly—on, Nelly!" when she turned, and, exhibiting her tear-bedewed face, joyfully exclaimed:

"Oh—Hi! I'm so glad to see you!"

CHAPTER XII.

THE PLOT THICKENS ABOUT HI.

LEAVING Hi and Nelly together we will return to the Count Montalo, who, seated by the coffin containing his son, was weeping bitterly and saying:

"Why did I not die with you?" when Mrs. Raymond, Nelly's mother, entered the room and, approaching him, said:

"Walter!"

That was his proper name, he not being a count but an adventurer—Walter Mount.

"You here?" he hissed. "You come to gloat over my misery?"

"No, to warn you of your danger!" she quickly answered. "Have you seen Simon Lee?"

"Yes, and learned that he too has betrayed me!" he savagely returned. "When you tempted me to be false to my trust and to rob our dead master and mistress, I thought you would be true—now all is over with me!"

"You forget Lillian!" she replied. "You have a daughter, Walter—she is worth living for!"

"Why did you not tell me that Simon Lee had betrayed me?" he fiercely demanded. "Was it to drive me to still further crime?"

"I hear that he has been murdered," she observed, producing a newspaper. "There is a reward out, offered by his son Absalom."

"Do you know where the boy is?" said the count; as we shall term him in this story.

"Yes," softly returned the woman, "I do, if you will keep your promise of long ago, pay me a full half of what you robbed them of, I'll tell you exactly where you can find him. Simon Lee did not know."

"No," said the count, "he did not," then, thinking awhile, added, "I'll give you twenty thousand dollars the day that I have the boy in my power. As you say, I have a daughter. Poor little Lillian!"

"You've cheated me," said the woman, "and I have had my revenge. You have kept me poor in order that I might be your slave, but I almost escaped you when I won on that lottery ticket and, had I married Helen to the Count of Doria, would have laughed at you, as it is she turned against me because she loves the boy you hate so and has escaped from my hands. Now, Count Montalo, pay me five thousand down and I will reveal the residence and name of the lad who is an obstacle, a living menace to your safety."

"Come in an hour," he said. "You have no mercy on me."

"I want the money now," she quietly returned. "Time flies; the girl has defied me. Come."

Taking a check-book from his pocket, he wrote an order on his banker for the amount she had asked; then handed it to her, saying:

"When will you let me know where I can find him?"

"Now," she said. "That is, when I have cashed this draft. I will be here by noon and tell you all about him." Then turned and quitted the apartment, leaving the count alone with his dead.

In a few moments a girl of fifteen entered, and, after kissing the face of the dead boy, threw her arms about the man and sobbed:

"Oh, papa, have you not a word for me? He loved me. Why are you so cold towards your Lillian?"

Releasing her, he led her to the door, observing:

"Perhaps, when he is buried, I may learn to love you. Go; I would be alone."

Weeping and heartbroken, the poor girl slowly withdrew, and, when she was gone her father locked the door; then, turning to the dead, bent over the coffin and kissed the cold lips.

Yet that man was a robber and a murderer.

At noon the woman came back, and he proceeded to the parlor where she was seated.

His grief had not altered his hatred or desire to put Hi out of the world; the fact being, if the lad lived, and learned the secret of his birth, it would be all up with Count Montalo, alias Walter Mount.

"Well," he said; "where can I find the boy?"

"At Mr. Dick's drug store, Whitehall, New York," she replied. "He passes under the name of Hi Hildreth—or Hiram. Now I will go and find Nelly—she is probably there. Can I do anything for you, if I visit Whitehall?"

"Yes—send him to me," coldly answered the count. "I will take care of him. Stay—inform him that you have discovered I am his father—he will be deceived by that. I must secure him."

"Yes," she smilingly replied. "You would be in a nice hole if he learned the truth—to say nothing of the murder of Simon Lee."

That afternoon Mrs. Raymond started for Whitehall. Leaving the count and his accomplice in crime, we will return to Hi and Nelly.

"Let us go somewhere out of this?" said the girl. "Folks are looking at us," whereupon they quitted the park, and walked along the avenue, presently stopping at a restaurant, Hi saying:

"Come in, Nelly, I have some money—we will breakfast."

They were shown into a quiet corner, and, after partaking of their meal, entered the hotel part and proceeded to the ladies' parlor, which was empty.

"Now," said the girl. "You tell me your story, Hi, and I'll tell you mine."

The boy rattled away and related all that the reader knows, ending with:

"I wonder what the man's name is who killed Simon Lee?" adding, "is your experience more wonderful than mine?"

"It is strange enough," answered the girl. "Hi, that woman, Mrs. Raymond, is not my mother!"

"Never thought that she was," said our hero.

"I found she was poor," continued Nelly, "that is, was not as rich as she said. Then she wanted to force me to marry a wealthy old man, named Count Doria. I refused, and, to end it, ran away from her and came back. I'm glad you did not let Mr. and Mrs. Dick know I am here, as they believe she is my mother. I must explain this, myself, to them."

"You're not going back, are you?" cried Hi. "I only received your letter at Hoosick Falls; they don't know anything."

"Go back, yes! Of course I shall!" she replied. "Only I did not want them to know anything until they saw me. Mrs. Raymond will try and get me away, and I can't prove that I'm not her daughter."

"Why go back then!" urged the boy.

"Because they are true, good, honest friends!" she said. "Hi—come along with me. Mr. Dick will forgive you, he said he would!"

"Never!" he muttered. "What go back and humble myself to the man who has injured me—not by a heap!"

"Hi, dear!" she observed, placing her hand on his arm. "I am sorry to see that you are not yet master of yourself!"

"Oh, pshaw!" he returned, remembering Birdie's words. "That's played, Nellie! I'm about as good as other folks!"

That afternoon he accompanied her to the depot and took her ticket for Whitehall.

As he bade her good bye, Mrs. Raymond entered the depot, but did not see them, then, taking her ticket, passed out to a Pullman car.

"She's going to Whitehall!" breathed Hi. "Will you go now? I wouldn't! Dick will give you away!" Stung by this remark, Nelly said:

"I will go and show you what true friends Mr. and Mrs. Dick are! Good bye, Hi!"

"Good bye, Nelly!" he sulkily replied. "I'll go and see the count! Address me as—let me see?"

"Jack Cross!" she merrily asked, kissing him.

"That will be a good name."

"Yes, Jack Cross!" he said. "I think any name better for me than Hiram Hildreth!"

Hi was right.

CHAPTER XIII.

ENTERING THE LION'S DEN.

RETRACING his steps from the depot, Hi wandered around New York, then returned to the hotel and went to bed, taking good care to hide his money where a thief would not readily see it.

The next day he watched the count's house and saw the funeral procession drive up, receive its sad burden and depart, and as the crowd, which was a very large one, pressed him against the railings of the stoop he noticed the housekeeper, who, signalling to Hi, with her finger, asked an officer to bring him to her.

The policeman did as he was directed, and the woman hurriedly whispered to our hero:

"Don't you want to go to his funeral? His father thinks a heap of you!"

"Yes," nodded the boy. "I'd like to go!"

"Come with me, then—next carriage," she said, and soon he found himself en route for Greenwood.

"What's your name, boy?" she demanded, when they were driven aboard the ferry-boat.

"Jack Cross," he replied.

"Thought it was Findout," she continued.

"No," said Hi. "It's Jack Cross. Findout was a mistake of the reporter's."

"The count has taken a great fancy to you," she went on. "He is very rich—you try and please him."

"Has he any family?" inquired the boy.

"Yes; poor little Lillian, his daughter; but he hates her," she answered. "Never has her near him or even at home if he can help it."

"Why?" he queried.

"Give it up," said the woman. "I never could understand it. He doted on his son."

After a long drive they arrived at the grave, but the count was too much overcome with grief to notice Hi, who, however, saw Lillian.

She was so beautiful that his heart warmed to her right away; a brotherly sort of love such as he felt for Nelly.

When the body was lowered into the grave, the count turned fiercely to her, saying:

"You do not weep—I suppose you are glad!"

"Hush, papa!" she whispered. "People are looking at us!"

She could not weep; her grief was too great, for the dead boy had been very good to her.

The count, who was really crazy with sorrow, watched the men shovelling in the earth, then, no longer able to bear his afflictions, began to rave, finding which the undertaker placed him in his carriage and drove him home.

"You come with Miss Lillian and me," said the housekeeper to Hi, and presently they were on their way, when the boy had an opportunity of speaking to the poor girl.

Lillian was about fourteen years old, very fair, blue-eyed and lady-like in expression, yet so sad looking that you at once knew that she had a deep weight upon her heart.

Of course, under the circumstances, Hi could not say much to her, though she expressed herself very grateful for what he had done in saving her father's life.

When they arrived at the house, the woman insisted upon our hero entering, saying:

"I am sure that the count will feel bad if we do not keep you here! He says he owes his life to you."

Little did the lad imagine that the man he had saved was the wretch who had plotted against his life, and that the count was the murderer of Simon Lee.

Hi was fairly entering the lion's den.

Conducting him to the parlor, the woman left him with Lillian, who chatted with him about her dead brother and they soon became friends.

After a while the housekeeper returned and told him that the physicians had pronounced his employer temporarily insane, but hoped that rest and quiet would soon restore him to his senses, adding:

"He has been calling for you, but is now asleep."

"I'll go up to him," said Hi. "I will help to watch him."

"I will accompany you," whispered Lillian, and in a few moments they were seated by the sick man's couch.

The count was in a deep sleep, so they chatted in a low tone and Lillian told the boy her history.

She had been at school ever since she remembered, and the count, her father, had been moving about from one country to another, always taking her brother with him.

"Do you know a woman named Raymond?" inquired the lad.

"No," answered the girl. "Unless she's the one who called on papa yesterday morning when he returned with poor brother. We had a girl here named Nelly Power, who, when she saw the woman, went away all in a hurry."

"Why didn't your papa have you home with your brother?" said Hi.

"It's an awful thing to say," timidly returned the girl, "but papa hates the sight of me. Do you know I sometimes think I'm not his daughter?"

"Can you keep a secret?" breathed Hi.

"Yes," she nodded, whereupon he told her that Nelly was his sister, and how Mrs. Power had taken her away, after which he made her promise not to reveal a word to her father.

"There's a mystery about this," she said, in a low tone. "How strange it will be if, after all, you really are Nelly's brother."

"I'm sure of it," he said. "Do you know I believe that Mrs. Raymond is the count's wife, and that she and he are kidnappers. I shall find out all about Nelly and my parents, and discover who yours are."

"It isn't natural for my father to treat me so coldly, is it?" she whispered.

"No," he replied. "Depend upon it, Lillian, we're all in the same box. This count isn't your father, and I and Nelly are brother and sister. Now, you be another sister to me, and I will fight for you."

"Oh, thank you," she answered. "My brother was very kind, only he would sometimes annoy me, but I always forgave him, as he only did it when he was not master of himself."

"Do you believe in that sort of thing?" demanded Hi.

"I believe we ought to try and conquer our temper," she said. "I used to be very hasty, but I have got over it."

"Hum," he mused. "Well, I'll try."

"You," she said, "are you not master of yourself?"

Hi turned his face from her, and then sulkily replied: "Spect I'm as good as any other feller. 'Tis strange I can't go any where but I'm told of this. I know I get hopping mad and say things, but what's a feller to do when he's chock full of bad temper?"

"Conquer it," she said. "When you've been through as much misery as I have, you'll be able to control your anger."

"Hum," once more mused Hi. "Well, we'll see; at present I don't feel like trying to check my natural feelings."

"But you should consider other folks' feelings," she gently urged.

"They don't consider mine," he grumbled.

"That is no reason in your favor," smilingly observed the girl. "Come, I will be your sister and keep your secret, but you must not give way to your temper. God has sent you here to help us all out of our trouble. Now, be a man, Hi, for I must call you by that name; be brave and patient, and put up with the

count. Who knows, you may find out the mystery that surrounds our lives?"

Hi rose, and, taking her hand, kissed her, saying: "See here, Lillian, I ain't known you more than an hour or two, but I feel as though you are my sister. You and Nelly are in my care now, and I will try and conquer myself."

"God bless you, Hi," she sobbed, returning his kiss. "My poor dead brother never said anything half so kind to me."

"Because he wasn't your brother," he whispered. "Hi," she breathed, "when papa comes to his senses again you'll be patient with him, won't you; he's an awfully savage man when he's mad."

"Yes; I'll try very hard," said Hi. "Very hard indeed, for your and Nelly's sake."

CHAPTER XIV.

BIRDIE ONCE MORE ON THE TRAIL OF HIS CHUM.

Mr. and Mrs. Dick were just sitting down to tea when their new girl entered the room, saying:

"If you please, there's a lady in the front parlor, who says she must see ye imma-date."

"What is her name?" demanded Mrs. Dick, who hated to have her husband disturbed at his meals.

The girl retired and presently returned, saying:

"She sez she ain't got any name at all, but that she wishes to see yez right away."

Mr. Dick rose, smiled at the girl's stupidity, and proceeded to the parlor, where he found Mrs. Raymond, who graciously extended her hand, observing:

"Of course you did not imagine that it was me?"

"My dear madam," began the old druggist, for he was a very polite man, "I am delighted to see you. How is our Nelly?"

"Oh! your Nelly, or rather my Helen, has turned out very headstrong!" replied the woman. "Is she not here?"

"Here?" gasped Dick. "My gracious, no! We thought that she was with you in Italy? Nelly headstrong—you astonish me!"

"I had great trouble with her," continued Mrs. Raymond, in a sweet voice. "She was giddy, and after promising to marry a very wealthy man—Count Doria—refused!"

"She's young yet," observed Mrs. Dick, who, just then, entered the room. "Nelly never was giddy with us."

Mrs. Raymond told a long story, then once more remarked:

"I expected to find her here."

"Well, she isn't with us," bluntly answered the druggist.

"Is that rude lad of yours, Hi, at home?" demanded their visitor.

"No," replied Dick, "he isn't."

Mrs. Raymond was about to inquire where he was when she was suddenly seized with a sort of fit, and fell fainting upon the floor.

"Run and fetch some water, wife," cried the old gentleman, and away went Mrs. Dick, who, upon reaching the kitchen, saw Nelly, then cried:

"My gracious me, child—how came you here? with your mother?"

"Hush! no!" said Nelly. "Is she here? I came in by the back door."

"Yes, your mother is in the parlor and has fainted," ejaculated the old lady, hastily procuring some water and a towel.

"Don't tell her that I'm here," hurriedly requested the girl.

"All right," nodded Mrs. Dick, bustling off again.

"I'm burning to hear your side of the case, child," then vanished from the apartment, returning, in a moment, to ask Nelly if she would summon the family doctor.

When the latter arrived he saw the sick woman and pronounced it a case of paralysis, saying:

"It is a bad shock; she may live a long time but will probably never recover the use of her tongue or hands!"

A consultation was held and, as Mrs. Raymond had a large sum of money concealed about her, legal advice was taken and a lodging procured for her.

Nelly agreed to nurse the woman, but stoutly asserted that she was not her child.

It was a painful duty, and at the end of a week the girl sent for Mr. and Mrs. Dick, and after telling her story requested them to engage some one to assist her, as she had to be up half the night.

"I cannot understand her at all," murmured the druggist; "she said she was your mother—now why should she lie?"

"I don't know!" answered Nelly. "She professes to be fond of me, yet endeavored to force me to marry that count—! Would a mother do that?"

"I don't know! It puzzles me! It's all a mud-dle!" replied Dick. "Anyhow the woman must be nursed and cared for, and we cannot expect you to do it all, so we must get some one to help you. I'm sorry that you don't care for her."

"Don't think me hard-hearted," pleaded the poor girl; "if it were either of you, I would die to serve you! I can't tell you how badly she has behaved to me, and I never will believe that she is my mother!"

"Who can we get?" mused the druggist.

"There's Mrs. Bird," suggested his wife. "She goes out nursing, and this will be just the job she would like—easy times and good pay."

"Will you go and see her, Nelly?" said Mr. Dick. "Even though you do not love Mrs. Raymond, until she is proved not to be your mother, you must act as her child;" so away Nelly went in quest of the nurse.

Mrs. Bird was not at home, but Birdie was, and after the girl had stated her want, he told her what jolly times he and Hi had experienced together.

"Hi informed me of all your roguery when I met

him in New York," indignantly replied Nelly. "You're bad, mean thing, Birdie!"

"Oh, git out," chuckled the tramp. "I'm going to New York. I'll call on my old pal—what's his address?"

"Likely I'll tell you," cried the girl. "You want to rob him again, eh?"

"Shoo! Didn't I pay him back, eh?" snorted Bird.

"You think an awful lot of him, you do?"

"He's worth ten of you," she said. "He didn't run away from danger. When the railway accident took place, he helped others, did Hi!"

"I'd helped myself," grinned Birdie. "That's my motto!"

The arrival of Mrs. Bird ended the discussion, and after Nelly had arranged with the woman, she left.

"Mother," drawled the scamp, "I'm going away. I can't stay here alone. You've got a nice job, that will last you some time, Birdie's going."

"Where, my son?" demanded his mother, who loved him and thought him just perfect.

"Well, I've kinder made up my mind ter go ter New York," he chuckled. "All the fellers goes there and I don't see why Birdie shouldn't," with which he leered in a knowing fashion, adding: "Give me what money you have and I won't trouble you for another year!"

"That's what you always say," she replied. "I tell you what I'll do; I'll buy you a new suit of clothes and a ticket to New York, but not a cent will I give you!"

"That's rough!" grumbled the tramp. "I want shirts and under-linen—why—my flannels is like fishing nets!"

"I'll buy new ones for you," said his mother. "Now, Frank Bird, this is the last time I'll start you in life. You're a handsome, clever, smart feller, but you're lazy—dreadful!"

The boy smiled, and turning over in his couch, returned:

"I'd like to know who'd work when they have such a splendid mother, as you ter do it for 'em? Why, it's perfectly ridiculous," then lighting his pipe fell to musing; meanwhile Mrs. Bird began to clear up her house preparatory to going to Mrs. Raymond's lodging.

That evening the suit and undergarments were purchased and early the next morning she aroused her son in order to see him off by the first train.

He ate his breakfast sullenly, for he felt sorry to leave without taking her last cent—that being the sort of boy he was—not that he was without money but that he wanted more. To tell the truth, Birdie was a bad lot and was not improving.

"Good bye!" he growled, as she tried to kiss him.

"There, mother, don't be making a fool of yourself before folks! I think it's real mean of you to send me away without a cent!"

"Here's a five dollar bill!" she sobbed. "It's all I have, Birdie!"

Taking the money he smiled on her, and allowing the poor creature to embrace him, said:

"Now, you're what I call a first-class parent, you are! If I'm lucky, I'll send you some of this back," adding: "See here, don't tell folks where I've gone, then, returning her salute, jumped aboard the cars and, in another moment, was gliding out of the depot.

"God bless you!" moaned the poor creature. "You are real smart, Birdie—you ought to be a politician!"

That morning Nelly received a long letter from Hi, in which he related his meeting with Lillian, which, as may be imagined, intensely interested his sister.

"It seems to me," she mused, "we're all in one boat, Hi, Lillian and myself. I wonder who our secret enemy is, for he seems to me as much mine as Hi's."

Seating herself by the sick woman, while Mrs. Bird went out marketing, she wrote to our hero, and addressing the letter to "Mr. J. Cross," mailed it, after which she paid the Dicks a visit.

"How is your mother?" inquired the old lady.

"Oh, don't call her that," pleaded Nelly. "You are the only mother I ever had, Mrs. Dick. I'll do my duty to the woman, but I cannot call her mother."

In a little while Mr. Dick came in, and after saluting her, said:

"That scamp, Birdie, has gone to New York."

"How do you know, sir?" she asked.

"He started by the first train," replied the druggist.

"I saw him get into a car with two or three faro players. If he has any money they will clean him out." Meanwhile the object of their conversation was being carried towards New York, gambling with the sports and thinking:

"If these fellers skins me, I kin fall back on me pard."

CHAPTER XV.

A MEETING AND ANOTHER ACCIDENT.

DURING ten days the count alternately raved and was under the influence of drugs, but, on the morning of the eleventh, he seemed to be once more himself, and, addressing Hi, who watching by his bedside, said:

"My son, so you're not dead. You are my Walter."

"I'm not your son," replied our hero, but it was no use, the count persisted in saying that the lad was his boy, so the doctors told Hiram to humor him and pretend that he was the poor lad who had been killed by the railway accident.

It was very strange; the man being sane on all subjects but one—his son.

By the advice of the doctors Hi was dressed in the dead boy's clothes, and he certainly did not look unlike him.

Gradually the count became perfectly strong again, but he still believed that his son was alive.

Not being anxious to quit such a beautiful home Hi was rather pleased than otherwise, particularly as he

had fine clothes, a gold watch and chain and a pony to ride.

He soon began to feel very uppish and to put on airs; even Lillian coming in for a share of his temper.

If anything annoyed him he would fly out and bully people and, as he was everything to the count, the servants were afraid to speak.

The count would drive out with him and let him buy anything he wanted, at the stores, and all Hi now required was to have Nelly near him, but that could not be. One thing was strange, Montalo never spoke harshly to him.

Among the papers found on Mrs. Raymond's person was a certificate of marriage between Walter Mount and Mariah Sepscomb, which Nelly copied and sent to Hi.

This made him more than ever believe that the count and Mrs. Raymond were man and wife, and he did not feel sorry that the woman was prevented from doing any damage.

Spite of his luxurious times and having lots of money to fool away, Hi was not completely at ease.

At any moment the count might fully recover his senses when he would find out his error, turn upon him and denounce him as an impostor.

Perhaps it was that made him at times, strangely angry; one thing being certain, when his fits of ill-temper were over he was always very sorry, so Lillian did not dislike him any, indeed loved him much more than she had done the dead boy.

She knew how he was situated, and made great allowances for him.

They would spend hours together and the count was more kind to her than he had ever before been.

One day, when Hi was driving her in the park, he read Nelly's last letter to him, in which she described the sick woman lying on her couch with big, anxious eyes, as though wanting to confess something.

"If she only gets well, Nelly will know all!" observed Lillian.

"Yes—too much, perhaps," said Hi.

"Hi," she whispered. "Who is that tramp, grinning at us so impudently over there?"

Hi glanced in the direction referred to, whereupon Birdie quitted the sidewalk, and advancing into the drive, said, in his usual, off hand, free-and-easy style:

"Hello, old pard—how-de?" adding, "Yer in luck, chum! Who's der gal? Say, won't Nell be mad?"

"You've made a mistake, young man!" said Hi, getting very red in the face. "My name is Walter Montalo!"

"Oh, shoo," chuckled Birdie. "Yer kean't stick that inter me, ole pard."

"Ask this young lady, my sister," snapped our hero with which he turned to Lillian, saying: "Isn't my name Walter Montalo?" and whispered, aside, to her "this is Frank Bird. I must get rid of him."

"Yes, do," said the alarmed girl, who saw that Birdie was a disreputable-looking scamp, and who wished to save her adopted brother, then, turning to the tramp added: "this is Mr. Walter Montalo, son of Count Montalo, and I am his sister."

"Well, yer a awful pooty gal," observed Birdie, admiringly. "Yer pootier than my sister, Nelly Hildreth, or Raymond, as she now is called," then, winking at her, turned to Hi, and sniggering, in a most aggravating style, remarked, "So yer won't reek-kernize the chap wot saved yer from der railway accident, eh? I'm Frank Findout."

"You scoundrel!" savagely ejaculated Hi, making a cut at him with his driving whip, but the boy drew back and the lash struck the horses, starting them at a gallop.

Hi had in his anger dropped the reins, which now hung about the feet of the animals and sent them half crazy.

In another minute they went tearing along, with Birdie hanging on behind the vehicle.

Hi was determined not to lose sight of his pal.

On dashed the horses, at a furious rate, while Lillian clung to Hi, and screamed with fright.

Their pace was tremendous, and presently, in turning a corner, they struck a post, when over they went, Hi being thrown heavily and Lillian pitched across him, in a way that saved her from injury, while Birdie, who had let go when the carriage struck, was lying, upon his back, pretending to be stunned.

In an instant they were surrounded with carriages, and Lillian was invited to take a seat in an elegant vehicle, while a doctor attended to Hi, who was insensible.

Finding no one took any notice of him, but that he stood a very good chance of being run over, the tramp rose and went to the spot where Hi was lying upon the grass, on which he had been placed by the park police.

The poor fellow was as pale as a marble image, and was to all appearance dead.

Birdie listened to everything that was said, and noticed that Lillian, who was in terrible grief, spoke of Hi as her brother Walter.

This puzzled the scamp who murmured:

"Perhaps he has found his father, and that is his sister!" "Well, even if it is so, he needn't cut his old pard."

"Will he live, doctor?" sobbed Lillian, who had anxiously watched the face of the surgeon, as the latter made his examination of the poor boy. "Will he live?"

"I hope so, miss!" said the gentleman. "It is impossible to tell how much injury he has sustained. Where do you reside?"

"Fifth Avenue," she replied, giving the number.

Just then a park constable led back the horses, which had broken adrift and dashed across the grass, and on seeing the animals, Birdie pushed forward, saying:

"I know Walter Montalo. He is a friend of mine. I will take them horses home."

"Do you know this young man, miss?" said the keeper to Lillian.

"No!" she said, "I don't!"

"Oh! but your brother does, miss!" insinuatingly put in the scamp. "I know him very well. He would tell you so if he were able." Whereupon he looked significantly at her, adding, "I'm Frank Findout."

Hi had told her of his adventures with Birdie, so fearing to provoke the tramp, she agreed to his taking the horses back to her father's stable.

Accompanying her brother, who was placed in a private carriage, Lillian proceeded home, followed by Birdie, who was mounted on one of the runaways. He had discovered his pard, and meant to share Hi's good fortune.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE COUNT MEETS BIRDIE.

As Frank Bird rode slowly after the carriage containing Hi and Lillian, he perfected his plan of action.

"If he's a fraud," he muttered, "and has passed himself off as the count's son—which he may have done—why can't I pretend I'm Hi, or rather Frank Findout? It evidently hit me old pard when I said I was him. I'll try it."

He had read the account of the accident, and knew that Hi was the boy described as Findout.

Leaving the horses, at the count's stable, he walked

get I'm the boy as saved der count's life and Hi's—I mean yer brother Walter's."

"You're an impostor!" she said. "I know all about you. Are you not ashamed of yourself?"

Birdie grinned, then murmured:

"Well—guess not!"

"Now," she said, turning very pink, for she feared yet detested the intruder, "you go away. Here are fifty dollars for—for," whereupon she paused a moment, then said, "to pay you to keep away from this house."

Birdie took the bills, then began to examine them, observing:

"Are they good?"

"What do you mean?" she demanded.

"Well, yer see," he coolly replied, "there's such a lot of queer round that it ain't safe ter trust anybody," saying which he pocketed the money, then remarked: "How long will the count be fussing over Hi—I mean—yer brother Walter."

"Won't you go away, now I've paid you?" she indignantly asked.

"Not much," he chuckled. "This," tapping his pocket, is for saving your life! I wants a—thousand dollars fur saving yer ole man and brother. Them's Birdie's—I mean Frank Findout's terms and he don't back down a red cent."

"You know your name is Frank Bird," quickly an-

The innocent girl, who have given everything she possessed to save Hi from worry, rose and quitted the room, leaving Birdie smiling to himself and murmuring:

"What a blessed greeny she is! I've struck ile, I have!"

As he gazing upon a portrait of the count, by Sarony, he heard a noise and turning beheld the man himself, standing in the doorway.

For an instant he imagined that the picture had stepped from its frame, but presently the count spoke saying:

"Who are you?"

"Now or never!" thought Birdie, so, assuming his most insinuating manner, he replied:

"My lord, count, I'm Frank Findout, the boy who saved yer and yer son from the railway disaster!"

"Railway disaster?" echoed the count, advancing into the room. "Oh—yes, I remember!"

It was wonderful how he seemed to know everything up to the time of his son's death, an *nothing after that*, until he came to his senses and took to Hi as his boy.

"Well," coolly continued Birdie. "Yer never plank-ed over nothing fur what I did fur yer."

"I did not know where you were to be found," said the count, who seemed to be trying to remember something. "Why did you not come before?"



Pulling off his coat, Hi rushed at him, and at the risk of his own life, succeeded in putting out the fire.

round to Fifth Avenue, and mounting the steps of the house, rang the bell.

Luckily, that morning, the housekeeper had left for her home, in order to bury a relative, so, as none of the servants had been longer than a week in their places, and Lillian feared to expose the scamp, Birdie had a clear field.

"Can I see the count?" he inquired.

"He is with Mr. Walter, who has just had a dreadful accident," replied the girl.

"Any of the family at home?" insinuated Birdie. "Tell Miss Lillian that the young man, Findout, who saved her brother's life, is here."

"Yes, sir," said the girl. "Come into the parlor. I will call Miss Montalo."

Birdie was ushered into the magnificently furnished apartment and left alone while the girl summoned the young lady.

"My eye," murmured the boy, as he sank back into a luxurious easy chair. "Here's gorgeousness; fancy Hi Hildreth, the feller who can't master hisself, boss of this shebang. Gold—pictures! My goodness gracious, this must have cost a million dollars," adding, in an undertone: "Shares, pard. Birdie must have his little half or he'll bust yer old game."

In a short time Lillian entered, seeing whom he rose, and bowing, in his country style waited for her to speak.

"What do you want?" she said. "Are you not ashamed to come here? If it had not been for you the accident would never have happened."

"Put it on ter me, miss!" he murmured. "Yer for-

swered Lillian. "You are a bad young man."

"Don't git mad, miss," he said, in a whining, injured voice; "I wouldn't, if I was you. You're both down on poor little Birdie. You an' Hi Hildreth—I mean Walter."

"How much money do you want to go away and never come near us again?" she demanded, nerved to desperation by his insolent coolness and cheek. "My brother is not fit to see you, and we do not want papa to know any of Walter's old companions."

"Walter!" he chuckled. "Oh, my eye, Walter!" then winking, knowingly, said, "Well, give me a million dollars and I'll go."

"You ignorant creature," cried the girl. "Do you know how much a million is?"

"See here, Miss Lilly," he grinned, "I went to our high-school, was always one hundred in arithmetic. Come, if you can't pony up a million, how much will yer give me?"

"Fifty dollars more," she said. "That is all I have."

"Plank it over," he returned; "I ain't a hard chap, an' Hi, I mean Walter, is an old pal of mine, so I'll let yer off easy."

"You'll promise never never to come here again?" she solemnly asked.

"Bet yer I will!" he grinned. "I'm a gentleman!"

"It's all the money I have saved!" she observed, as she rose.

"You won't cheat me this time?"

"Oh—suttently not!" he answered. "Yer think I'd go for ter beat an elegant young lady like yer are—not much!"

"Well, yer see, I'm kinder backward—modest about myself," murmured the fraud. "This afternoon I saw yer son and daughter in Central Park, and saved the young lady from being killed."

Without saying anything regarding his daughter, the count thought awhile, then demanded:

"Are you poor?"

"Well, I ain't got too much money," replied Birdie. "I've a widdier mother, who is dependent on me, an' well, I am durned poor, an' that's a fact."

"Do you want a situation?" sharply asked the count, who, half crazy as he was, saw that the boy was a fraud.

"What sort of a posish will yer give me?" smilingly asked Birdie.

"To wait on my son," said the count, adding: "But you must drop your rough way of talking and put up with his temper."

"Ain't he master of hisself?" innocently inquired the tramp. "Oh, well, I don't mind being spoken to."

That evening Birdie, dressed in a neat suit of livery, was watching by his bed and thinking:

"I wonder how all this is coming out?"

CHAPTER XVII.

IN WHICH HI MAKES A CONFESSION.

For two weeks Hi remained in bed, suffering from concussion of the brain, and during that time he was faithfully attended by the count, Lillian and Birdie.

To the credit of the latter we will here record that he proffered the fifty dollars back to Lillian, who, how-

ever, refused them, bidding him send the money to his mother.

Birdie either forgot to do this or the letter miscarried, for, to this day, the woman had never received the amount.

When Hiram came to his senses he found the scamp by his bedside, looking as innocent as a baby.

"Know me?" he demanded of our hero, but Hi did not reply.

He wished to see Lillian.

All that morning Hiram remained quite silent, and though his attendant did everything in his power to make him speak, talk he would not.

That afternoon, when Lillian came to sit by him and Frank Bird was out of the house, he spoke, asking his adopted sister how Birdie came to be there.

She told him that he had forced himself upon them and that the count believed Birdie to be the boy who had rescued him from the railway car, on which Hi became very angry, getting into one of his old time "tears" and scaring the girl with his vehemence.

"I won't put up with this," he cried. "As soon as I'm strong enough, I'll lam that Birdie until he can't stand. Nice thing for him to come here and represent himself to be me—or as good as do it."

"Well, you mustn't get so angry," urged Lillian. "You'll have brain fever again."

"I don't care," he raved. "I don't care. I won't have a tramp—a loafer—like Frank Bird, say he's me. Blame him—I never heard of such impudence."

Lillian smiled.

"What are you laughing at?" he demanded. "You're a friend of his, eh? You think there's no harm in his passing himself off as me?" saying which he pulled the sheet over his face and raved away beneath the bedclothes.

Lillian remembered he was passing himself off as her brother, and it was that that made her smile.

After a few moments, he suddenly uncovered his face, and said:

"Get out of this—I'm going. I won't stay here any longer."

"You're not fit to go, anyhow," she replied. "I won't leave you. I've some letters for you, from Nelly."

That cooled him, and surlily demanding the epistles from her, he opened and read them.

Nelly had little news for him, and beyond being sorry for his sickness, of which Lillian had informed her, said nothing of importance, but the letters did him good.

"You think I'm a great fool to get so mad, don't you?" he observed to his companion.

"Well, I do, Hi," she answered. "You forget that you are passing yourself off as my brother. Birdie is only following your example, in calling himself what he does."

"Very well," sniffed Hi, once more getting mad. "That settles it," and, turning his back upon her, pretended to sleep.

When Birdie returned, Hi was still lying there, but had not spoken another word to Lillian.

"Hello, pard," demanded the scamp, as she quitted the room. "Hav'n't yer got a word for yer old chum?" but Hiram did not reply.

After dinner, about six o'clock, for the count dined late, the latter entered Hiram's room and inquired how he was, Lillian having told him that our hero had spoken to her.

"Oh, I'm all right," growled Hi.

"He's a little mad," breathed Birdie, behind his hand to the count. "He's mad because I'm here."

"You had better leave then," coldly remarked the count, signaling him to withdraw, which he did very promptly, murmuring:

"If my old pard goes back on me, I'll bust his little game, or my name ain't Frank Bird."

"What is the matter, my son?" demanded the count, as the tramp withdrew.

"I want you to kick that fellow out of the house," sullenly returned Hi.

"But he saved our lives," observed the count.

"Shoo!" grunted Hiram, who was so angry that he did not stop to think of the consequences. "He's a fraud; his name isn't Findout."

Ringing the bell, the count bade Lillian come to him, then directed her to give Birdie some money, which he placed in her hands, saying:

"Tell him to clear out, and never to show his face here again. He's an impostor—Walter says so."

Birdie took the money, grinned, went up to his room, packed his clothes, and several suits of Hi's, which he had hooked for his own use; then, placing them also in a trunk that had been given him by the count, went for an expressman, and was soon clear of the house.

As he left the room he observed softly to himself:

"All right, my old pard, I'll be even with you!"

That night he sought some of his gambling acquaintances and was quickly cleaned out of his money; meanwhile Hi, delighted to think how easily he had rid himself of his late partner, rapidly improved, and in a day or two, was able to sit up, and was soon about again.

The count was more devoted than ever, sparing nothing to promote Hiram's recovery.

Two weeks after Birdie left, our hero received the following note, written on a dirty scrap of wrapping paper:

"WALTER MONTALO, ESQUIRE—DEAR HI:—I think you was real mean to have me bounced as you did. See here, Hi Hildreth, if you don't send me fifty dollars by the young feller who brings this, I'll split on you, as true as my name is FRANK BIRD."

P. S.—Nice sort of a pard you are! You said *halves*—now you goes back on your word."

"Is there any answer?" inquired the servant who had brought the note to him.

"Yes!" he nodded, then, taking a sheet of paper, wrote:

"FRANK BIRD:—I'll see you *hanged* before I send you a *cent*. HIRAM HILDETH."

Enclosing this in an envelope, he handed it to the servant saying:

"Give this to the person who is waiting!" then proceeded to the count's room.

Hi found him examining papers and evidently disturbed about something.

"Well, my son?" began the count, but Hi stopped him with:

"I must tell you the truth, sir, I am *not* your son, Walter!"

"Not my son?" quietly replied the man, passing his hand across his brow. "Well, do you know that I believe I have been crazy?"

"So you have, sir!" answered Hi. "Don't you remember—you lost your poor boy in the railway accident, when I met you?"

"Yes, yes!" dreamily returned the count. "You are not my Walter! He is dead—dead! I am sane now!"

He appeared quite broken down, and Hi felt sorry for him, yet it was better to tell him the truth.

"I'm going!" said the boy, holding out his hand.

"I'm sorry for you, count, but—I—can't stay here any longer! I won't be a fraud!"

The man did not reply but sat as still as though suddenly stricken dumb.

CHAPTER XVIII.

ANOTHER MEETING OF THE OLD PARTNERS.

PROCEEDING to Lillian's room, the boy told her what he had done, and she agreed that it was the best so.

"He has some awful secret on his mind," she said. "This morning I overheard him muttering to himself: 'I killed the fellow that he might not beggar my son, and she has cheated me.'"

"Killed the fellow!" gasped Hiram. "Can it be possible that he is Simon Lee's murderer?"

"When he was sick—when I watched by him—he used to rave about Simon Lee!" she whispered. "You know he went away with my brother Walter, and was in Northern New York when the murder was committed."

As they were speaking they heard a faint report of a pistol and a heavy fall, upon which Lillian said:

"That is my father—something awful has occurred!" Proceeding up stairs they found the count on the floor, while by him was a small Smith and Wesson revolver.

He had shot himself through the heart.

"Is not this awful?" whispered Hiram. "We shall never know the secret now!" while Lillian knelt by the body and prayed.

In a very short time the house was filled with policemen and journalists, and that afternoon an inquest was held.

Beyond a small bag of washleather, which he wore about his neck and which contained a faded portrait of a young girl, a mere child, they found nothing upon him—no letter or explanation of his deed, so the coroner's jury returned this verdict:

"Died by his own hand—insane!"

A grand funeral and an official examination of his papers, followed, when Hi explained that he was not the dead man's son and told the lawyers how he had come to be called so. Strangely enough he was not shown the locket.

A well-known judge was appointed Lillian's guardian, and her property, seventy-five thousand dollars in government bonds, was placed in his charge.

Hi parted from her with much regret, for she had been as good as a sister to him; but as he was no relation to her the judge could not keep him; however, our hero promised to call and see her and to let her know how he progressed.

He had some money and good clothes, so he felt no fear about the future.

One day he was going from one office to another, endeavoring to procure work, when he encountered Birdie.

At first he was ashamed to face him, as he had obtained his dismissal, but Frank made him at ease by saying:

"I've forgiven yer, chum."

"You seem in luck, Birdie," he said, glancing at his old partner's clothes.

"Yes," nodded the other, "I'm in a banking house. Won't you come and take a glass of soda?"

It was hard to refuse such a request; so Hi agreed, and after Birdie had treated him, inquired if he would take another.

Frank was well-dressed and clean—cleaner than Hi had ever seen him—in fact, was quite a respectable-looking chap.

After they had swallowed their second soda, Hi found he had only a ten dollar bill in his pocket, and was tendering it in payment when Birdie nudged him, saying:

"I'll give you change for that, pard. These people sometimes shove the queer," with which he took Hi's bill and gave him a new five, two tattered ones, and three new one dollar bills.

Liking the nice, clean notes, Hi planked over a soiled one and received his change, after which Birdie quitted him.

Within an hour Hiram entered a down town restaurant and calling for some liver and bacon began his dinner.

Thinking some ice cream would be good, Hi ordered a plateful then, when he had polished it, rose, and sauntering to the cashier, threw down one of his new bills, and said:

"Hand over the change."

The man felt it, then demanded:

"Where did you get this?"

"That's my biz!" said Hi, in a quick, offensive tone.

"Got any more of them?" quietly inquired the man.

"What's that to you?" growled the boy. "You've got too much cheek—mister!"

The cashier gave a peculiar signal to the head-waiter, on which Hi, producing his wallet, handed over his other ragged bill, observing:

"Give me the new one—perhaps you like dirty money?"

The cashier did not return the first bill but, making change for the second, was slowly counting it, as though about to pay it over, when a policeman entered, and Hi was given into custody for passing counterfeit money.

In vain he pleaded; he was taken before a justice and charged; whereupon he said it was not his money.

"What name?" demanded the clerk, meaning what was Hi's name when, misunderstanding the question, he replied, "Frank Bird."

"Committed," shouted the clerk, and, as he was led away, a detective said to him:

"I want you, my fine fellows; so you're Frank Bird?"

"I'm not Frank Bird," he indignantly replied. "My name is Hiram Hildreth."

"Singularly enough, that is just what your pal calls himself," returned the man.

"I've no pal," cried Hiram. "I'm an honest boy, I am."

"Oh, of course," smilingly returned the detective. "They found two more ones and a fiver in your wallet; you're *honest* enough. How do you get over that?"

"It's a base conspiracy of Birdie's," he angrily answered.

"There, that will do," said the officer; "either confess all or stop chinning. Come, will you or the other squeal first?"

"What other?" demanded Hi.

"Why the other Frank Bird, the fellow who calls himself Hiram Hildreth."

"Where is he?" screamed Hi. "Let me get at him."

"Come, we want you to go with us in the Black Maria," quietly remarked another policeman. "Just shut up."

Hi was obliged to comply, and in two minutes was in the prison van on his way to the Tombs.

He felt dreadfully bad and too angry to speak.

Upon arriving at the Tombs he again saw the detective, who said to him:

"Come, my boy—confess and save us the trouble of hunting down the gang?"

"What gang?" snapped poor Hi.

"Why yours," said the man.

"You must be crazy," groaned the boy. "I don't belong to a gang. I'm Hiram Hildreth!"

"Oh, pshaw!" jeered the detective, then, whispering to the turnkey, added: "We'll soon show you who you are."

"This way!" growled the jailer.

Utterly beaten and sick at heart, Hi followed his custodians until they reached a cell upon the fifth tier, in which someone was playing a tune on his chin.

"Will you stop that row?" said the turnkey, through the little square grated hole in the door, addressing the prisoner inside, whereupon the noise ceased.

Unlocking the ponderous bolts, the man nodded to our hero, but did not speak, and in another instant Hi was in the cell.

It was so dark, that for some moments he could not distinguish the form of his fellow captive, while the latter, who was stretched on a low bench—his bed—was quietly sniggering to himself.

As the door was locked again, the detective crept up and entered an adjoining cell, where he could hear all that Hiram said.

"He, he, he!" chuckled the mysterious stranger as Hi savagely chuckled himself on the unoccupied bench.

"What are you grinning about?" snapped our hero, after his companion had repeated his exhibition of merriment, when the figure sat up and, after indulging in a loud guffaw, cried:

"What, don't yer know yer old pard, Birdie?"

With a cry like that of a tiger Hi dashed at the tramp, and grasping him by the throat, hoarsely exclaimed:

"You wretch, what made you give me that bad money?"

The detective was all ears.

"Leave me go," gurgled Birdie. "Dern yer, leave me go!"

"I'll kill you if you don't confess!" hissed Hi.

"Ain't I always been honest?"

"Yug—yug—yes!" was the choking reply.

"Why did you take my name?" demanded Hi, giving his victim's head a bat against the wall.

"Wa—wa—why did you take *mine*?" yelled Birdie, who was beginning to think that his old partner would kill him. "I'm committed as Hiram Hildreth, you as Frank Bird."

Hi relaxed his grasp and, staring at him, said:

"My gracious, I'm ruined! Mr. Dick will hear of this!"

CHAPTER XIX.

HIRAM TO THE RESCUE.

"COME, be reasonable!" groaned Birdie. "I'll help you out if you'll only keep your hands off me!"

"I could kill you!" said Hi. "Ain't I always been honest? Wish I'd never left Mr. Dick!"

"Don't yer like being yer own master, pard?" inquired Birdie, backing into the far corner. "Ain't anything better than that old drug store?"

"No, it ain't!" shouted Hi. "I see what a fool I've been!"

The detective listened harder than ever. "Oh, you're joking!" continued Birdie. "Even if yer sent up, yer won't have ter work. Come, make up yer mind ter it!"

"What—be a thief?" cried the boy, bravely; "never!" "I don't call my last business thieving," smilingly observed Birdie. "It's financeering. I don't think it dishonest."

"I do," said Hi. "It's thieving of the meanest kind. I want you to help me out of this, Frank Bird."

"Of course I will, pard," the tramp replied. "I'm sorry yer got hooked—awful sorry. I'll tell you how you can git off, but yer must keep this a solemn secret."

"How?" demanded Hi. "I'll do anything to get out of here."

"Well," slyly whispered Birdie, "s'pose I tells you der names of der gang, and yer squeals? Yer ain't afraid of being killed?"

"What do you mean?" said Hi, while the detective laid his head against the wall and listened with open mouth.

"I mean for you to pretend to be one of us, and to tell on the crowd," replied Birdie, with a sly chuckle.

"You mean that you want to make me meaner than you are," cried Hi, once more rushing at his companion.

"Here, shoot that," screamed the other, who was really afraid of his victim. "I'll own clear up, if you'll only stop."

Hi paused, with his fists close to Birdie's nose, and demanded:

"Will you clear me?"

"Oh, certainly," murmured the other. "Wish I hadn't taken your name or stuck you with them bills—you're an awful hard nut, you are. I thought I'd fix you nicely, but didn't want my head mashed."

"How are you going to clear me?" said Hi; "nobody will believe you?"

"Oh, I'll give the gang away and clear out," answered the fellow. "I can say you are my pal, and then they'll let us off."

"See here," put in our hero, "I'm no pal of yours—now, you can just chalk that down and remember it. I never liked your loafing ways, I've always tried to be honest, and if I only get out of this scrape, and you ever dare interfere with me—you stand clear—that's all."

"You wouldn't kill poor little Birdie, would you?" inquired the tramp, in a mocking voice. "After all I've suffered at your hands you wouldn't go for to do me a bodily injury, eh?"

The tone was so annoying that Hi went for him again; whereupon the detective procured the key of their cell and, when Hi had given Birdie a sound whipping, entered, saying:

"Here, what are you young thieves doing?"

"I am no thief!" excitedly exclaimed Hiram. "Unfortunately I know this critter," pointing to Birdie. "He can't prove I did a mean or dishonest thing in my life!"

"Oh, can't I!" growled Birdie. "I say, officer, am I to be kept in here with a fellow who wants to murder me, because I won't lie to clear him?"

The detective did not reply.

"Do I look like a thief and don't he?" cried Hi.

"I'm sure I can't say!" responded the officer. "If I could tell thieves by their looks it would be easy for me to attend to my business!"

"He means dat he'd spot yer right off pard!" muttered Birdie, winking at Hi, who at that moment would liked to have killed him, but was rapidly learning to master himself.

"Come," said the detective to him, "tell me your story, clear and honest;" on which Hi related all his adventures since leaving home, keeping nothing in reserve.

Every now and then Birdie would snigger incredulously or pretend not to believe the story, but the detective neither moved nor spoke.

When Hi had completed his narrative, the officer turned to Frank Bird and demanded if he could disprove any of it, whereupon he replied:

"Oh, I don't want ter spoil me old pard's little game. He's owned ter fooling der count and ter getting me der grand bounce—because he was afraid I'd tell who he was. I ain't got nothing ter say, only dat he's me old pard, and he can't deny it. He agreed ter leave Whitehall wid me and ter shove der queer—"

"It's false!" cried Hi, making a furious dash at Birdie, but the officer interposed, and saved the artful wretch from further punishment, and our hero, remembering his resolve, curbed his temper.

"Boys," said the officer, "one of you is a rascal. Now, I think I know which—"

"Why it's Hi, of course," grinned Bird. "Mister, he's a regular fraud. Yer thinks he's so smooth spoken dat he's innocent—bless yer—he's der one as led me away and shot me in der head because I refused ter jine him—in—" here he chuckled again, "in passing der stuff."

To his credit our hero did not reply beyond saying:

"That is not true!"

"You must drop fighting," observed the detective. "To-morrow you will be taken before the judge! Now promise me, Hiram, you won't strike that boy again as long as you are here. If you do this I will take up your case."

"I promise," said Hi, adding, "What do you mean by you'll take up my case?"

"I'll see if I cannot find out the mystery between that count and yourself!" answered the man.

"Oh, der count was Hi's father!" sneered Birdie, who now that his companion had promised not to strike him, felt sassy.

"See here, young fellow," quickly observed the man. "Let me give you some advice."

"Oh, I'm always thankful for that!" said Birdie. "What is it, mister?"

"Keep your tongue quiet!" calmly returned the officer, with which he withdrew for the night.

When the rounds were made both boys seemed asleep; but Birdie was only shamming, and no sooner had the sounds of footsteps died away in the corridor than he drew a match from behind one ear, and a cigar from among his long hair, and, lighting the weed, tossed the burning match upon his straw mattress, after which, turning over, he commenced to smoke.

In a few minutes the canvas of the bed began to smoulder; but, not noticing it, he smoked on, presently falling asleep.

Just as the straw burst into flame, Hi aroused, and, half awake, said:

"Smells like fire;" then rubbed his eyes and beheld the cause.

By that time Birdie's light summer garments were ablaze, and soon the unfortunate fellow was aware of it, and began to scream:

"Help! help!"

Pulling off his coat, Hi rushed at him, and, at the risk of his own life, succeeded in putting out the fire, burning his hands fearfully in his gallant effort, and yelling all the time for assistance.

When, at last, the turnkeys came they found Hi holding Birdie on the floor, and Frank crying:

"Oh, oh! Hi set me afire! Hi set me afire!"

CHAPTER XX.

A REMARKABLE DISCOVERY.

Two weeks in the prison hospital, with his hands in oiled lint, gave Hi considerable time for reflection, while Birdie, who was at the point of death, owned to having secreted the watch and cigar, and cleared our hero of the unjust charge he had made; still he would not confess all and prove his companion's innocence, so Hi lingered in prison until the day of trial when he was removed to the court house.

To his surprise the judge proved to be Lilian's guardian, while, by his side on the bench, sat the young lady.

Conscious of his innocence, Hiram did not hide his head, but stood in the dock quiet and respectful.

The evidence of the restaurant keeper looked very bad for the boy, but, when he was asked what he had to say, he related his story so truthfully, that the court applauded him, after which the detective mounted to the platform and testified to all that our hero had said being true.

When the jury were asked for their verdict, they said "Not Guilty," and in less than no time, Hiram Hildreth was pronounced free.

As he was leaving the court an officer tapped him on the shoulder, saying:

"The judge wants you in his room," and presently he was ushered into an apartment where he found the detective and Lilian.

"I'm so glad to see you," said the young lady. "We only knew it was you when you entered the court."

Of course he felt good, and when the judge came in, was proud to hear him say:

"I knew by your face that you were an honest boy. What is this about the count?"

"I don't know," answered Hi.

"What were you whispering to me just now?" demanded the judge of the detective.

"I believe that I can prove that the late count was an impostor," said the man, "also that this young lady was not his daughter."

"I'm glad of that," said Lilian. "I never believed that I was any relation to him."

"Can you tell me who I am?" nervously asked Hi.

"Show him that picture, miss," remarked the detective to Lilian, adding to Hi. "I have been having a little chat with this young lady, and have made a discovery."

Lilian produced the locket, and the detective unscrewing the ring-pin, exhibited a second picture, which was as like our hero as could be, while beneath was written:

JOSEPH REVERE,
Aged 2 years.

EVOLINE REVERE,
Aged 2 years.

The boy looked at it, then observed:

"I think that the faded picture is like you, Lilian."

"Yes," she replied, "and the other is like you."

"This is very strange," replied the judge, taking the locket. "Why, it looks as though you were brother and sister. Yet, the girl has blue eyes. No; I guess you're relatives."

"I hope that it will prove so," said Lilian.

"So do I," murmured our hero. "I feel as though it ought to be."

"Have you examined the papers of the late so-called count?" asked the detective of the judge.

"Not closely," answered Lilian's guardian, adding: "I will place them in your hands and this boy, who seems to be Lilian's brother, shall search them with you! I have let the Fifth Avenue house, but if you wish to go there, you can;" then, turning to Hiram, said: "Young man, you may or may not be this young lady's brother, in any case, until it is decided, I offer you a home in my house."

Hi thanked him, and that afternoon he, the detective and Lilian, were busily engaged in examining the contents of a safe, discovered at the late count's residence.

There was a mass of letters from Walter Montalo to his father, but, beyond the following hotel bill, nothing of importance.

HOTEL MEURICE, PARIS, June 3—, 18—.

To Monsieur J. Revere,
Apartments.....760 francs.

Received payment,
PRO. MEURICE—PASCAL."

"What is that worth?" inquired Hi, as the detective placed it aside.

"Read the note, in pencil, on back!" returned the man, whereupon Hi read as follows:

"THIS IS A SWINDLE."

Self and Evoline - - 2 persons
Joseph and Evoline, - 1 " ½ for children.
Walker Mount, valet, ½ " ½ rate for domestics.
Helen Raymond, - ½ " ½ rate for domestics.
Mem.—Avoid this hotel in future. J. R."

"Well, what do you make of it?" demanded the man.

"I'm puffed," said Hi.

"I think that our papa and mama were Monsieur and Madame Revere," interposed Lilian.

"But you are only fourteen," remarked the detective.

"I never thought of that," she said. "Why, of course; Joseph and Evoline were twins."

"Let me look at that locket again?" quietly asked Hi.

Lilian handed it to him, and he unscrewed the pin; then, placing his own portrait in the light, said:

"My eyes, hair and skin are dark—this picture is like me," after which, turning it, he murmured: "This is Nelly's portrait."

"Nelly who," demanded the detective.

"Nelly Raymond," answered Hi.

The man thought awhile, then said:

"I've been trying to connect this case with a strange one that I have had in hand for years, but have utterly failed. When I heard your story I went to the gypsy camp, and, while you were in the hospital, hunted everywhere for evidence. One thing I believe, Walter Mount, who called himself Count Montalo, murdered Simon Lee for revenge, as the gypsy had failed to kill you, but the next thing is, why did he wish to get you out of the way?"

"What case did you wish to connect us with?" asked Hi.

"The De Courcey case," replied the detective. "Seventeen years ago, Ferdinand de Courcey, a poor but handsome Southerner, married a wealthy New York lady or rather ran away with her and her diamonds—they went to Paris and lived there, but suddenly vanished, since which time the lady's family have, in vain, endeavored to discover her."

"It's an awful knot!" mused Hi. "Somehow I seem to be Nelly's brother—I'm all adrift on this?"

"Do you think that the woman who calls herself Nelly's mother could enlighten us?" said the detective.

"She's struck dumb!" said Hi.

"Suppose we go to Whitehall and show her these pictures?" suggested the man.

"Good idea!" said our hero, and two days after, the officer, Hi and Lilian were at Mrs. Raymond's lodgings, where they found Nelly looking more beautiful than Hiram had ever seen her.

"Can we interview the woman?" asked the officer.

"Yes," replied Nelly. "She is lying there on the sofa—has never spoken since she was seized!"

The four entered the room, and Mrs. Raymond seemed to recognize them but could not speak.

Producing the locket, Lilian showed it to her when the woman, half raising herself, endeavored to speak, then dumbly pointed to Nelly and motioned them to open the trinket.

When this was done she continued to signal them, as Hi unfastened the ring-pin on which she indicated him, then continued to point at the locket, all the time making an awful sound like a dumb person who endeavors to talk.

Nelly understood this and taking the portraits inserted a knife between them, when they opened like an oyster, on a hinge, and a paper, yellow with age dropped upon the floor.

It was the key to the mystery of Hi's, Nelly's and Lilian's parentage.

CHAPTER XXI.

"A MYSTERY BUT PARTLY SOLVED."

The detective opened the paper, then read:

Joseph and Evoline Revere,
Married May 1, 18—

Joseph } born May 1 18—
Evoline }
Eunice, born Aug. 7, 18—

After which he said: "I'm right off the scent; this ain't the De Courcey case!"

"Don't this look terribly as though Nelly and Lilian were my sisters?" observed Hi.

"Don't you build on that," replied the officer; "things ain't always what they look!"

"But they must be!" urged the boy; however, the man did not seem to see it, merely remarking:

"If that woman could speak, she would be able to tell all."

Mrs. Raymond seemed to partly understand him, but made no sign of importance, so they quitted her room and went into the adjoining apartment.

Hi was very angry with the detective for not acknowledging that the persons named in the paper were Nelly, Lilian and himself; but, remembering his promise, held his tongue.

"Well, what are we going to do?" asked Nelly. "We can't be more like brothers and sisters, so let us go on, earn our livings, and try to forget this mystery."

"I can't do anything until I know it," said Hi, once more examining the miniatures; then, after a few moments, scrutiny, added: "See here, Nell, you've sharp eyes, what is this?"

"There's a name scratched on this rim—inside," replied the girl. The detective took the picture and, producing a pocket magnifying glass, read:

"JOSEPHUS CRICK, MAGNOLIA, S. CAROLINA!"

"Now we have it!" cried Hi, but the man did so

seem to think much of the discovery, and, after asking Nelly a few questions, decided to return, per next train to New York, at the same time inquiring if Hi desired to go.

"Of course, now you're in Whitehall, you'll call on Mr. and Mrs. Dick?" said Nelly.

Hiram felt like saying "no;" however, he went and found the old druggist and his wife very much delighted to see him.

Not a word did they say about bygones, but chatted on concerning the discovery in the locket.

"What do you think of it, sir?" asked Hi.

"Well—I do not agree with the detective," remarked the old gentleman. "I should think that if you found the maker of that locket, or the man who sold it, it might lead to further developments."

"I won't attend to that woman any longer!" put in Nelly, who, with Lilian, had accompanied the boy. "She isn't my mother, and I've had about enough of her!"

Hi glanced at the pretty girl, then observed:

"You're mad now, Nelly."

"No, I'm not," she replied. "I've borne this, patiently enough, all the while I thought that it might be a duty—but, now, let some one be paid for it as well as Mrs. Bird!"

As she said this, the latter woman knocked at the back door of Mr. Dick's house.

"Come in!" cried the old lady, and in came the woman who, after curtsying to their host and hostess, thus sharply addressed our hero:

"You're a nice boy to lead my son into bad company and to land him in prison—eh?"

Hiram was about to fire up and give her a bit of his mind about Birdie, but a look from Lilian stopped him, while the latter said:

"Mrs. Bird, it is not so! Unfortunately your son fell into bad habits long before he met with my brother!"

"Your brother!" sniffed the woman. "You're all claiming relationship with this feller; none of you want to call my son your brother."

The girls smiled.

"I've come to tell you that the woman is worse!" she continued. "She has had another fit, and the doctor, who is with her, says she won't last long!"

They hurried back and found Mrs. Raymond very low. It was quite evident that she was terribly tortured in her mind and desired to speak.

Hiram, the detective, Mr. and Mrs. Dick, Mrs. Bird and the two girls were standing round her bed, when the dying woman made a great effort.

"She wants to speak with you, miss," whispered the officer to Nelly.

The girl bent over the woman, who, after a long pause, said: "My mother," then overcome with pain—moaned and died.

They watched her for a moment, and felt that it was best for her to be at rest.

"I shall remain here!" murmured the detective; "this is the most knotty case I ever came across!"

In due time the woman was buried and her property handed to Mr. Dick, who was appointed Nelly's guardian; but, to the chagrin of the detective, no clue was found among Mrs. Raymond's personal effects.

Until proved otherwise, the law received Mrs. Raymond's statement that she was Nelly's mother, but the girl resolutely refused to touch a cent of the dead woman's money, and went back to live with her good friends, Mr. and Mrs. Dick.

Hi, Lilian and the detective returned to New York, and, on parting with them, Nelly said:

"I shall think and think, until I find out what that woman meant, Hiram. I know, between us, we can unravel this awful doubt and mystery."

"I think so," he said. "I shall go South, and try and discover Mr. Crick."

On reaching New York, they proceeded to the residence of Lilian's guardian, finding him at home.

"I've brought these young folks back," the officer observed to the judge. "I've done my best, but they ain't the De Courcay heirs, so I shall give up the case."

"Why?" demanded the judge, examining the paper.

"Oh, there's no money in it," replied the man. "I've lost my time over it. Instead of the reward offered by the De Courcay family, these children, if they are brothers and sisters, are Southerners—and there's no money in their case."

"Very well," answered the judge. "I am sorry that you have not found they are the De Courcay heirs. I will pay you for your time." With which he motioned the officer to withdraw, then, turning to Hiram, said:

"My boy, you are the proper person to work out this secret. I will advance the necessary funds, but you must be cautious in your outlay, as I am far from being rich."

Of course Hi was delighted.

"Don't you think that I am Joseph Revere, sir?" he said.

"I am inclined to believe so," answered the judge. "It seems very plain to me that you are the son of Mr. Revere, that Ellen Raymond is your sister Evoline, and that Lilian, here, is Eunice Revere."

"And I am Joseph Revere!" cried the boy.

"Patience—patience," gently returned the judge. "It will take some time to prove all this."

"And that fraud of a count?" said Hi, who vainly endeavored to control his feelings, "wasn't he my father's valet, Walter Mount, and wasn't that woman, who called herself Mrs. Raymond, Helen Raymond, our servant?"

"It appears like it," quietly answered the judge.

"Now, Hiram, for, until we know to the contrary, we must continue to call you by that name, go and have a good night's rest. By the way—do you know, your acquaintance, Birdie, has escaped from the hospital? I fear that he is a bad boy."

"I am afraid so, too, sir," said our hero. "Good night, Lilian; good night, sir. I will try and be as cautious and careful as I can in spending your money, but I would like to prove that I and Lilian, and Nelly, are brother and sisters." Then full of the idea, he went off to bed.

It was past eleven o'clock ere the judge retired, and as he quitted his study, a figure emerged from a closet in the corner of the room.

It was Birdie.

He had sneaked into the house, as the pal of a gang of burglars, who had given him shelter from the police, and had compelled him to act as their accomplice.

For six weary hours, he had been huddled up in the cupboard, every moment fearing that he would be detected.

Stretching his cramped limbs he waited and listened until everybody had retired for the night, then murmured:

"Who'd have thought I'd tumble over me old pal, here?" after which he crept down stairs, and silently unbarred the basement door.

CHAPTER XXII.

IN WHICH IT GOES MIGHTY HARD WITH BIRDIE.

As Birdie gently opened the door, a man, who had been hiding in the shadow of the house, said in a low tone:

"All right?"

"All serene!" breathed the boy, adding: "but I want you a moment!" whereupon he informed him that it was the judge's house, and urged him to give up their idea of robbing it, but the fellow only laughed at him, saying:

"Yer keep yer derved tongue still! He's got money, he has—besides"—with an oath—"he's the fellow who sent my brother Jemmy up for ten years. You wait until I brings my pals round and don't worry yourself about der judge! If I gets my grip on him, I'll send him where he won't sentence any more poor chaps!"

Birdie was a loose fish, which was his mother's fault, and the thought of robbing was not so very shocking to him—but the idea of murder made him tremble!

"How long will you be?" he demanded of the man, who was waiting until the policeman passed up the street, ere he essayed to start.

"Ari an hour!" growled the burglar; adding: "Mind yer here, awake, when I taps twice!"

"I'll be on hand!" grinned Birdie, who had rapidly made up his mind what he would do. "Go on, old man! Street's clear, now!"

The scoundrel vanished, and Birdie, closing the door, crept softly up stairs, his boots being left in the cupboard.

"He ain't on dis yer floor!" he mused, as he reached the second flat. "Guess I'll go up to der top ob der house!" with which he silently ascended until he reached the Mansard rooms.

Luckily, for him, the moon was shining.

Peeping into the rear apartment, in which some one was snoring heavily, he noticed a woman's garment, whereupon he drew back and tried a front room.

Noiselessly turning the handle of the door he softly moved in, and there, upon the bed, right in the light of the moon, was Hiram.

Creeping to him he clapped his hand over the sleeper's mouth, then said, in his ear:

"Wake up! It's me!"

"Who—eh—what?" said Hi, in a half-smothered voice. "Who are you anyhow?"

"Yer old pal, Birdie," breathed his awakener.

"Sit up—don't make a noise and I'll tell yer suthin worth listening to."

Half asleep Hiram complied, on which Birdie rapidly related his story, concluding with:

"Now yer jist wake der judge an' admit der boys, an' I'll slip out, as dey slips in, an' alarm der cops."

It was not long ere the judge was aroused, and the two men-servants awakened and stationed in the basement hall, both of them being armed with short staves.

He would not trust them with revolvers.

"Now," he quietly observed to Birdie, "you let them in and, as we pounce upon them, Hi will open the hall door and run to the police station."

"Yer won't let 'em kill me, judge!" pleaded the boy.

"I don't want to be a thief any longer," and he spoke the truth.

"They shan't hurt you, if I can avoid it," replied the judge, then, bidding his servants sit on the floor of the basement, he squatted down beside them, while Birdie, with his heart in his mouth, took up his post at the door.

In a few moments they heard the signal:

"Tap, tap!"

Birdie's hands trembled so that he could scarcely undo the bars, but, presently, he succeeded.

"All right?" demanded the head burglar.

"All right!" said the boy, in a nervous voice.

"Go on, ahead, then!" growled the man, who seemed in a bad humor. "When yer reaches der fust landing scratch a match an' show us der way—hear?"

After which, speaking to his pals outside, he added: "Come right in, chaps." The burglars, three powerful fellows, crept in and, when they had closed the door, their leader drew a match from his pocket and lighted it upon his sleeve, at the same instant, the judge and his two servants, powerfully-built Irishmen, rose and went for his fellows.

Then followed a tremendous struggle and the reports of two pistols, a cry of pain from Birdie and curses on the part of the burglars, while Hi, darting down the front steps, rushed off to the police station.

"Give it to 'em, boys!" shouted the judge.

"Knife 'em!" yelled the boss burglar, but the Irishmen plied their sticks, and soon laid out three of the

robbers, while their employer was choking the fourth. "A light, boy! a light!" he cried, but Birdie only groaned, saying:

"Oh, my gracious! I'm killed!"

Giving his body a tremendous twist, the chief burglar suddenly threw the judge, and was drawing his knife, when the door was burst open and the policemen flashed in their lights, crying:

"Come, surrender!"

"The game's up!" coolly observed the man, dropping his weapon, and in another instant the gang were ironed and dragged out upon the sidewalk.

"Where's their boy?" demanded the sergeant. "He's in the house somewhere. They always have a boy with them."

They procured a light and discovered Birdie in a corner, lying all doubled up, and bleeding fearfully.

"Guess you've about finished him," said one of the police. "He's shot through the lungs; he'll bleed to death in no time."

The judge explained that they owed their lives to the wounded boy, and said that he would be responsible for his custody.

"All right, sir," answered the officer; then, after promising to send a doctor, he withdrew.

Hi presently came down stairs, when they raised Birdie and carried him into the kitchen, where he was laid upon a table.

He was white about the lips, and could not speak, while, at the slightest motion of his body, the blood began to ooze from his wound.

"I'm afraid that he is past praying for," said one of the men. "I wonder which ball struck him?"

"The burglar's," said the judge. "I fired towards the door."

After a long delay the doctor came, and the first thing he did was to order them to give the boy some wine, and that done he began to strip the sufferer and examine him.

"What do you make of it?" demanded the judge.

"Turn him gently upon his side," said the doctor, as though puzzled.

This was done, and, after a moment's pause, he said:

"All right—the ball has passed clear through him."

"Will he live?" eagerly asked Hi.

"It all depends," returned the surgeon. "I can't say yet. If the lungs are uninjured he may pull through, but I don't think, even if he dies, that anyone will miss him! There are thieves enough in New York."

"He has a mother, sir," whispered Hi.

"Well said," quietly observed the judge.

"Oh, I shall try and pull him through," smilingly remarked the doctor: "I didn't mean to infer that I will not do my best for him."

CHAPTER XXIII.

IN WHICH BIRDIE TURNS OVER A NEW LEAF.

LUCKILY for Frank Bird, the burglar's bullet had not injured a vital part of his anatomy, and, beyond a great loss of blood, he was not seriously injured.

They removed him to Hi's room, and made him as comfortable as possible, our hero acting as his attendant.

Of course, this, for a time, put everything else aside; still, in his long watches, Hiram often thought of the mystery that surrounded his life, and longed to begin unraveling the thread.

He loved the two girls very dearly, and was more anxious to clear their names than his own.

"Had we not better send for Mrs. Bird?" suggested the judge, as, day after day, the sick boy lay silently, as though dreaming, upon Hi's bed.

"No," replied the watcher. "He is pulling round, as the doctor calls it; he is better. I don't think he will die."

"But why not send for his mother?" pleaded Lilian, who just then entered the room. "Poor Mrs. Bird, with all his faults she loves her boy!"

"There's just the trouble," answered Hi. "I don't want her here to praise Birdie for his act and gloss over his faults. I'm going to take him in hand; I think that I can reform him. If the old woman comes she will stuff his head full of nonsense, and, as she believes that he's in prison, let her, for the present. I've written Nelly all about this."

"You're right!" said the judge.

Slowly—so gradually that they scarcely perceived it—the sick boy recovered and, one morning, delighted his nurse by smiling and faintly ejaculating:

"Pard!"

"Yes—it's Hi!" laughed the latter, "you're all right now—eh?" But Birdie was too weak to say any more; however, in a few days, he conquered his enemy and began to talk quite freely.

It soon became evident to Hi that Frank was a changed boy, but he did not preach to him.

One day, after our hero had assisted the patient to sit up, he said:

"You've had a narrow squeak, Birdie."

"Yes!" nodded Frank. Say, Hi—dy'er think der judge will try an' get me off? I was hard up when I met dem counterfeiters an'—God knows I want to do different now! I'm sorry I served yer as I did!"

"You will have to be tried," said Hi, "make an honest confession—do not save yourself at the expense of others, but just tell exactly how you came to pass the money, and say you will never repeat the offense."

"I wish I'd kept like yer, pal," murmured the boy. "Well, yer right! I won't give any of them away, out of spite or desire to save myself, but will just tell the honest truth!"

Hi related this to the judge, who said that was right, and when the boy was quite well, and was re-arrested, he was bailed out by his new friend.

All this time Hi was burning to go South, but he was learning to master himself, and bore the disappointment like a hero.

After a long delay, Frank Bird was brought to trial, when his counsel bade him tell his own story, which he did honestly and well; showing, that he had been more sinned against than sinning.

The jury were evidently impressed, and, after a short consultation, returned a verdict of:

"Guilty, but we strongly recommend the prisoner to mercy!"

Poor Birdie, he stood in the dock alone, and ashamed, but when the judge spoke, he faced him bravely; being determined to bear his punishment like a man.

"Frank Bird," said the official, in a quiet, cold tone, "you have been found guilty of passing counterfeit currency, and the law adjudges a penalty for your felony, of a fine of one thousand dollars or fifteen years' imprisonment with hard labor; but, in consideration of your evidently honest confession, by which the police have been enabled to break up the gang, I will simply fine you a hundred dollars!"

"I will pay that," said Lillian, who sat near him.

"Bless you, miss!" murmured Frank, while the court shouted its applause.

In a short time the money was paid, and the boy was released, on which he approached Lillian and, bowing like a man, said:

"Miss Lily, my future conduct shall be like your act," then was about to retire when his guardian observed:

"Where are you going?"

"To get an honest living, sir," he quietly answered.

"Here, Frank Bird, you're held as witness in the case of burglary!" said an officer, serving the lad with a summons. "It's the first case on the docket after the one that's on now."

Luckily, the affair on trial was a brief one, as the parties consented to a compromise, so the burglars were marched in and placed in the dock.

There was the usual fussing and objecting to jurors but, after some delay the trial began, and Frank was placed on the stand as a witness.

He gave his evidence so well that the prisoner's counsel could not shake it, then the judge was called and the case for the prosecution closed.

As they had no defense, being caught red-handed, they were pronounced guilty and sentenced, each, to ten years' hard labor.

"All right!" savagely muttered the head burglar, then turning to Frank Bird, said: "See here, you darned young informer, you've sold us, but you'll never live to see us out! Our gang has sworn to punish you."

"Yes!" nodded the other three. "You'll have your throat cut, you will!"

"Remove the prisoners!" quietly observed the presiding judge, while Birdie, turning to Hi, said:

"I know what they mean, but I don't care!"

"What!" asked our hero.

"They'll set their bully on to me!" said Frank. "He never thievs, but he does their fighting for them!" "You must come to my house?" whispered Lillian's guardian. "I have something to tell you!"

As the young folks quitted the court, they found an excited crowd of roughs assembled round the door. These were the burglars' friends.

Pointing to a tall, savage-looking bully, Birdie whispered: "That's the man."

The fellow heard him, and drawing a pistol from his breast-pocket, reached over the heads of those before him and fired, but Frank was too quick for him, and dropped, so the ball flattened itself against the court-house wall.

Without waiting to discover if his shot had taken effect, the cur turned and fled, the darkness, for by that time it was evening, effectually assisting his escape.

"Are you hurt, Birdie?" anxiously inquired Lillian.

"No, miss," replied the boy, rising; but he never forgot her words.

As they entered the carriage her guardian, who had lingered behind, to speak with a brother judge, came up to them, saying:

"Was that a shot I heard?"

"Yes," answered Birdie. "Mashing Tom fired at me. He is the fellow who is to kill me."

"He shall not succeed," said the judge; "you shall go South with Hiram."

CHAPTER XXIV.

IN WHICH THE BOYS PROVE TO BE TRUE HEROES.

As might be imagined, Frank Bird was delighted to hear that he was to go with his friend, for Hi was now beginning to like the merry fellow.

Birdie had lost none of his fun, but in all other respects he was a changed boy.

It was a lovely November day when they embarked on board the steamer for Port Royal.

Lillian was there to see them off, and the judge to give them instructions, while the last mail delivered on board the steamer, brought a loving farewell from Nelly.

"Now you have money and arms and a good outfit," observed the judge. "I think you will find some clue to the secret," then, shaking hands with each of them, added to Lillian: "Kiss your brother; we must be going; I have a case to hear this morning."

The girl gave our hero a tender kiss, which he returned, then shook hands with Birdie, saying:

"I shall depend upon you to help my brother, to stand by him through everything."

"I'll do it, Miss Lily!" he said; "I'd die for your brother, miss!"

When the judge and his ward had quitted the ship and were driven up the wharf, Hi observed:

"Ain't she a good girl?"

"Good," murmured Birdie. "She's an angel!" then muttered to himself: "But there—she'll never care for a feller that has been a thief!"

In due time they started, and were soon steaming southward.

Everything was new to the boys, and they thought the ship splendid.

As they were chatting aft, a tall, well dressed man came up to them, and, patting Birdie on the back, said, in a quiet, familiar tone:

"Why—Frank—dear boy—what are you doing here?" "Nothing that will benefit you!" he quietly answered.

"Oh—come—don't put on frills!" laughingly remarked the gambler, for it was one of the boy's old friends. "Come and take a bottle of wine, dear boy—ask your chum to join us!"

"No, I thank you—colonel!" firmly returned Birdie, "I shall never gamble again!"

"Do you mean to insinuate that I'm a gambler?" bullied the man. "Darn you—what's the matter with you—you thief?"

"He's no thief!" quietly observed Hi, whose nostrils trembled with rage. "You won't make him one, either!"

"Take that!" cried the bully, dealing our hero a back-handed blow on the mouth and loosening two of the boy's teeth.

"You cur!" shrieked Birdie, letting drive with his right and left and knocking the sport clean over the taffrail.

The fellow turned a somersault and landed, head-first, in the water; whereupon Hi seized a life-preserver and threw it to him.

"Man overboard!" roared a deck-hand.

"Man overboard!" bellowed another.

"Man overboard!" screamed the ladies.

In a short time the engines were stopped, a boat lowered and the man picked up; but he said that he had fallen overboard and, as no one but the boys saw him go or noticed him till he was far astern, his story was believed.

As he passed the lads, on his way to his cabin, he said:

"I'll get even with you—darn you!" but they did not reply.

On the second night out, when somewhere off the coast of Virginia, Hi and Birdie being asleep, one in the lower bunk and the other on the sofa, in their state room, a thick smoke began to creep along the passages, and the lads commenced to cough. After awhile Hi sat up, and snuffing, murmured: "Smells like smoke;" then rousing Birdie, told him to dress.

They were below the water line, in the range of state-rooms beneath the ladies' saloon, no other passengers being there.

"My good gracious," gasped Birdie, "the ship is on fire!" whereupon he began to dress, Hi following his example; meanwhile they heard cries overhead.

Securing their money and weapons, they rushed up the companion-ladder to find the ladies' saloon in flames, while the terror-stricken passengers were screaming for help, and rushing about like maniacs.

The fire was in the after-hold, and had cut off the companion-ladder, shutting the after saloon passengers in like a burning wall.

"Throw your arms away—your pistols!" shouted Hi, tossing aside his revolvers, and seizing an axe.

Birdie did as he was told, crying:

"I'll stick to yer, pal," then grasped a tomakawk.

"This way, ladies!" cried Hi, rushing towards the terrified women. "Down below—I'll save you!" but they held back or made desperate attempts to squeeze through the narrow port-holes of their stateroom.

There were two decks above them, so they could not escape by the sky-lights for there were none.

Fairly dragging some and driving others before them, the lads moved through the burning cabin, and, with a child on each arm, succeeded in getting about forty of the ladies down the lower stairs, then, hurrying them along the under passage, presently reached a bulk-head.

Handing their charges to the terrified crowd, they began to batter at the wooden partition and soon broke it down; meanwhile, the fire, which was raging in the hatchway by them, roared like a furnace. Bang—splinter—crack—smash! fell their blows, and presently they broke down a plank and saw, beyond them, the engine-rooms, with the engineers bravely at their posts.

"Go along that iron platform and get on deck, as soon as you can!" shouted Hi, above the din. "We'll return and rescue the other women!"

The awe-stricken ladies hugged the children to their bosoms and crawled through the opening, while Hi and Birdie bravely returned to save more of the imprisoned ones.

By that time the cabin above was all aflame, the fire having worked along it and licked up the state-rooms, the wood-work of which was highly varnished.

All the people, but two babies, were insensible, and the little ones were lying upon a mattress, at the top of the stairway.

"First one!" cried Hi, seizing the nearest infant.

"Eh?" shouted Birdie, who was half-choked and bewildered.

Hiram placed his burden in his arms then, picking up the other one, yelled:

"Quick—quick! There's not an instant to be lost!" and absolutely driving the other before him, forced his way back.

As they crawled along the now densely clouded passage, holding their coats over the children in order to prevent them from being suffocated, they heard a tremendous explosion and were hurled off their feet.

CHAPTER XXV.

SWIMMING FOR DEAR LIFE.

THE boys remained upon the floor of the passage

wondering what had knocked them down, while the children set up a cry of terror.

All of a sudden Hi discovered that the water was rising on them, whereupon he scrambled to his feet and shouting to Birdie to follow him, picked up the baby who had fallen from his grasp, and crept towards the hole.

The captain had sent all hands to the boats, and in order to put out the fire, had opened the valves in the ship's bottom and was rapidly filling her.

Upon emerging into the engine-room the lads were met by a thick, greasy vapor that arose from the salt water entering the furnace doors and smothering the fires; however, nothing daunted, they groped their way along the platform and presently arrived at the foot of the ladder.

"Up you git," mumbled Hi, who was most anxious not to swallow too much of the choking steam.

Birdie did as he was directed, but on reaching the top step, discovered that the hatch was closed and battened down.

"Good land!" he groaned, "we're fastened in!"

Believing that the engine-room was empty, the chief engineer had caused tarpaulins to be thrown over the hatchways and battens of wood nailed round, thus completely rendering them air-tight.

A faint light, from the stoke-hole below, struggled through the mist, but, otherwise, all was dark.

Now that the boys had vowed to save the children—there was no "give up" for them—they were both true grit—for Birdie was determined to stick to Hi.

"There's one of them iron ventilators somewhere," said Hiram, in a muffled tone, referring to the circular shaft, with cowls, that supplied the engine-room with air.

"It's right above!" said Birdie, pointing overhead. "Let's put the little uns down, and you get on my shoulders and climb up to it?"

"Good!" cried Hi, and, after his chum had made a back, up he got and, inserting his fingers in the lower rim of the ventilator, presently succeeded in raising his body, and by dint of using his hands, elbows, toes and knees, soon climbed to the bend of the big pipe, where he found an obstacle in the shape of a chunk, composed of old sail-cloth.

Luckily there were two stout iron handles screwed inside the cowl, so grasping one of these in each hand, he lowered his hand and butted like a goat until he fairly forced the mass outward, when up rushed a cloud of vapor, in the midst of which he emerged like a spirit.

The officers and crew, firemen and coal-passers, were busy lowering the boats, and keeping the passengers from crowding into the passages like sheep, so nobody noticed him, and presently he was hard at it, removing the coverings from the engine-room door.

Luckily he found an ax near, and was enabled to rip and tear up the battens without hurting his hands.

As he succeeded in opening the door, he heard Birdie moan:

"Help."

"I'm here," he cried, descending by sliding swiftly down the hand-rail and landing on his chum's prostrate body.

First securing the little ones, Hi took them on deck, then rushed back and yanked out Birdie.

He was only just in time, for Frank was gasping like a dying fish; however, the fresh air soon revived him and they turned their attention to the babies, who were staring and blinking at the fire.

Birdie had kept them so well covered that the smoke and steam had not affected them.

Four boats were away from the ship, and a large craft, up to windward, was signaling them that she would come to their assistance.

The explosion had been caused by the bursting of some barrels of paraffine that were stowed under the after saloon.

After watching the signals of the vessel, Birdie observed:

"Say—Hi, seems a mighty few people up here! Where's der others?"

Hiram shuddered.

Over four hundred souls were hopelessly imprisoned below; cut off from all help by the fire in the hatchway.

The steamer was like a big hotel with the stairways all round the elevator and with that elevator on fire.

"Who in thunder removed these tarpaulins?" roared the chief-engineer, who came tearing along the deck. "I secured them all—the fire will get more draft! Come, you boys, help close this!"

The lads worked with a will. They did not know that they had done their best to fan the flames, and that in a fire the right motto is "close everything."

"Come!" said the man. "There's a chance for you in the next boat!" adding: "Where did you get these babies from?"

"The ladies' saloon!" answered Hi, as they secured the last batten. Then once more taking the children in their arms, they hurried to the bow of the ship.

The fire was roaring up the main-hatch and pouring out of the after ports, giving light enough for everything—an awful light, for, below, a crowd of human beings were furnishing part of the fuel.

As the boats came alongside the bow, the passengers were lowered by means of ropes, and soon all but our boys and their charges were embarked.

"Hold hard!" cried the captain. "Send them kids!" Whereupon the last boat came back and, when the infants were lowered, some one in it cried:

"Room for one of them boys, but for only one!"

"You go, Hi. I'll stay until they come back!" said Birdie, while Hiram declined and urged him to go.

"Not much," said the boy.

"We can't stay fooling here," yelled the officer in charge, "she may blow up at any moment!" Whereupon he ordered the men to pull towards the rescuing ship, which they did with a will.

The lads were standing by the capstan, talking in a quiet tone, when suddenly they felt a blow, as if each had been struck all over, then found themselves flying into the air.

The cargo in the main-hold—two hundred cases of giant powder or *dualin*—had exploded and blown the ship to atoms.

Whirled round and round and struck in mid air by flying splinters of the wreck, the boys were instantly deprived of their senses, but, on landing in the water they quickly recovered them.

Hiram fell quite close to his chum, and immediately struck out, swimming until he came to a spar, while Birdie floated on his back.

It was then the gray of the morning, and you could make out objects that were quite near.

His first exclamation was:

"Wonder where Birdie is?" When, on glancing round, he beheld him quite near to his support.

"Bird," he cried, "swim this way."

"Can't," said Frank. "If I turn over I know I shall sink."

"Can't you swim any?" demanded Hi.

"Yes—but I can't with my arm broken," he returned. "I guess one of my legs is injured too."

Quitting the spar, Hi swam to him, and presently succeeded in towing him back to the timber, to which they both clung.

In a short time a man, spent with swimming, came towards them and was about to grab at the spar, when Hiram shouted:

"No room here!"

"For heaven's sake, let me rest awhile!" pleaded the man. "I'm almost dead!"

It was the sport.

Recognizing the voice of their enemy, they bade him join them, but told him to be cautious, as the spar would barely keep two afloat.

"God bless you, boys!" he said, as he clung to the timber. "I can't tell you how much obliged I am!"

"Well, never mind that!" said Hi. "Just hold on, gingerly, and don't swamp us—that's all. Show your gratitude that way!"

"I will!" replied the man. "If I get out of this, alive, I'll give up gambling and cheating!"

"Chum," said Bird, "I don't believe that my leg is much hurt, after all!"

"Perhaps your arm isn't," suggested his friend, but unfortunately it was.

"I see lots of pieces of the ship," observed the sport; "she blew up with terrible force! I was in the dingy, astern, waiting to ship off when the explosion upset me and landed me in the water."

"Was yer tryin' ter steal off alone wid a boat?" said Bird, whereupon the man explained that he had been followed by others, but they were driven back by the smoke and flame.

"I tell you what I'll do," said Hi, as, after repeatedly hailing the rescuing ship, they found that no one noticed them. "We're drifting away from that craft; she's at anchor and I guess all hands are tired out with attending to the folks brought from our vessel. You rest your hand on my shoulder, Birdie, and I'll swim with you to the ship? This spar is sinking fast and if we stay here we shall all be drowned."

At first Frank would not hear of this, but, finally, he consented and, placing his uninjured hand on Hiram's shoulder, started with him, Hi swimming with hands and feet and Birdie using only his feet.

It was a long, wearisome drag, over a mile, in a choppy sea, but the water was warm.

As they neared the ship a white object darted across their course.

"What's that," gasped Birdie.

"A shark!" quietly answered Hi.

"Oh—my gracious!" moaned Bird. "He smells my blood!"

"Swim away! Swim!" yelled our hero. "Swim and holler like forty!"

Bird made his legs twinkle, and the two boys yelled: "Help—help!"

Again the monster crossed their track, his white belly flashing like a sword in the sun.

"Stick to it, pal!" gasped Hi, as they neared the gangway ladder of the ship, and in two minutes more they were out of the water.

CHAPTER XXVI.

BRAVE HI.

On climbing the ship's side they found all hands, but two look-out men, asleep, and learned that the latter had not heard their cries, being actually slumbering at their posts.

"The sea is strewn with the floating wreck," said Hi.

"Can't you send and rescue some of the survivors?"

"No!" answered one of the men. "We'd been up eight and forty hours; afore we sighted you we'd bin aground on a bank, about two miles above this; well, as we was setting sail agin this morning, we sighted you, and now, your ship is blown up, we're taking a rest!"

"But lend me a boat!" urged Hi, wringing the water out of his garments. "I can scull her around and save some of the poor souls from being taken by the sharks."

"Take the dingy," said the man. "Say, would you like a dry suit of clothes?"

"Well, we would," nodded Hi, and soon they were in the fore-castle and had shucked their wet garments for dry, our hero borrowing some calico-strips and a book-cover, which he cut into splints, then with this rude material, setting Birdie's arm.

Luckily their money, which was in oilskin bags, was uninjured.

When Hi returned to the deck he saw the captain, who, like the look-out men, was dead beat.

"I've done all I could," he explained to the lads, "but cannot work my men another hour—they're wearied out and must rest! You go and try your hand and, please goodness, the sharks will not attack the survivors! I guess the monsters are all gorged."

Leaving Birdie to go to sleep in the long-boat—which was on deck and full of hay—for which reason it had not been sent to rescue the people from the burning ship, Hi entered the dingy and seizing the oar shipped it in the stern rowlock and scuttled towards the spar, to which still clung the sport, who, as the boy arrived, was saying his prayers and about to let go and drown.

Getting him in, he next scuttled to a group of four, who turned out to be the captain, mate, and two coal-passers; all of them pretty well exhausted and terribly afraid of the sharks, which were circling about them in shoals, but, as the other captain had thought, were too much gorged to do harm.

"Come, my son," said the captain, as Hi was heading for an empty water cask, ahead—to which was clinging a man, who evidently could not swim, "come, take us aboard the ship—this boat won't hold any more!" but Hi quietly remarked:

"It's going to hold one more!" and saved the poor fellow, the chief engineer, who had already lost one foot by the sharks.

Returning to the ship he disembarked his load, and again started upon his merciful errand, saving over forty persons.

When he arrived alongside with his last lot, the ship's cook was lighting the galley fire, and presently all hands were turned out.

The crew of the ship had worked like heroes, and were as generous as could be, supplying the rescued men with dry clothing and aiding to nurse the wounded; while Hiram was the hero of the hour.

After partaking of a meal, the captain consulted with the captain of the burnt vessel, and it was announced that the rescued ones would be landed at Charleston, as the ship would not risk running into Port Royal, after which they mustered the survivors of the lost craft.

Three hundred and seventy out of over eight hundred persons answered to their names. The rest had perished in the fire, leaped overboard, or been blown up.

"And we are saved," said Birdie, as Hi told him the awful truth. "Well, I'll try and be grateful to God for sparing me. No wonder the sharks only swam round us—they were full."

It was nearly a week ere they reached Charleston, for they had head winds and no steam to aid them—the engines of the craft that rescued them being disabled with her going on shore—but, finally, on a lovely morning, they landed on Johnson's wharf, and prepared to disperse.

By that time Birdie's arm was set and doing nicely. Everybody shook them by the hand, and, as they were preparing to enter a hack, the captain of the lost ship cried:

"Three cheers for Hi and Birdie!" which were given with loving good will. That was their only reward, but it was enough.

On arriving at the hotel, they inquired for Magnolia, when the landlord demanded:

"Which Magnolia? There are a dozen places of that name in South Carolina."

Hi mused awhile, then said:

"Guess we'll try the nearest first."

"You can't start until noon," remarked the landlord, so they went into the hotel and breakfasted.

About eleven o'clock, a gentleman, whose wife and child had been rescued by them, entered the parlor, where they were seated, and invited them to his house, where he presented each of them with a revolver and a rifle, after which they were conducted to a drygoods store, and furnished with a complete outfit.

They had saved their money, and the portraits, but had lost everything else.

When they bade their new friend good-bye, he said: "Boys, but for your noble conduct, my dear wife and child might have perished with the rest. If ever you want a friend, come to me. I am Charles Le Grange, and am known all over the South as a lawyer."

Hi and Birdie thanked him, then, mounting the stage, started for Magnolia.

They had kept their business a secret from every one, and all believed that the lads were going hunting.

After a weary drive, among swamps and cypress-woods clothed in long, grey moss, they halted before a tumble-down hotel.

"This is Magnolia," quietly remarked the driver. "Guess everybody has gone to bed."

"Guess everybody is dead," murmured Hi, and he was right.

CHAPTER XXVII.

MAGNOLIA NO. 1.

DESCENDING from the stage, the boys entered the hotel, and, knocking loudly, cried:

"Hi, landlord," but only the echo answered.

"Well, I'm going on," said the driver. "Folks had the fever here awful bad a week ago, and maybe they've cleared out. This is my first trip of the season."

"Fever!" they asked. "What fever?"

"Yeller!" answered the driver. "They had an awful spell of it lately."

Proceeding into the bar, they noticed a rude placard on which was daubed:

"MAGNOLIA HOUSE."

"Proprietor will return to open about the 1st of December."

"I'd advise you to go on," said the man. "Most likely all the folks who didn't git away is dead!" whereupon the lads remounted to their seats in the stage, and were soon on their way again.

The swamps were covered with a dense fog, so the

boys did not care to open their mouths; however, towards morning they arrived at Summer Valley, and things began to look more civilized.

"Magnolia, number one, didn't amount to much!" observed Hi to his chum.

"No" murmured Birdie. "Isn't that yaller fever awful—jes' fancy—everybody in a big town dead or cleared out? Why do they live there—anyhow?"

"Give it up!" answered Hiram. "It's a conundrum!"

A good meal and rest at the hotel soon made the boys feel like themselves again and, as they chatted over their coffee, Bird said:

"'Spouse we ask some one's advice? We're going on blindly now. If there's a dozen Magnolias down South, we don't want to try them all."

"I don't wish to give myself away," said Hi, who was becoming over cautious.

"Oh—nonsense!" laughed Birdie. "Les' ask an old colored man who knows something."

"Where will you find one—eh?" replied our hero, who was unaccountably snappy.

"Why, that old daddy, there," answered Bird, pointing to the head waiter. "Bet you he knows everybody."

Calling the ancient darkey to them, Hi demanded:

"Do you know any place called Magnolia, uncle?"

"Yes—gemmen!" he returned, bowing and showing the top of his bald pate. "Dar's Magnolia in de swamp—'tween hea an' Charleston—lubly place in winter—gemmen!" here he scratched his wool. "Den dar's Magnolia on de Santee, near Orangeburgh, and Magnolia beyond Walhalla where I was raised," adding: "Dat's near de State line—almost in Georgia!"

"Did you ever know a man named Josephus Crick?" demanded Hi.

"Crick—lemme see," he mused. "It's such a powerful time since I was dar, gemmen, dat I mos' forgets folks' names."

"He was a silversmith or goldsmith," said Birdie.

"No gol'smifs in Magnolia," murmured the old man. "Dunno no silbersmifs neider."

Taking the portrait of Nelly from its case, which like their money had been secured from damages by water, Hi said:

"Crick made or sold dis—"

"Wa'—honey—wa' yo git dis?" queried the old man, as he took the portrait. "Wa' you git dat? Ki—dat de picture of my ole missis—wife ob General Le Masney, my ole massa!"

"What was his name?" asked Hi, in an excited tone.

"Le Masney," answered the old fellow. "She was de darter ob ole Colonel Gardinier, an' her name was—lemme see wa' was her gibbin name—I remember—it was Evoline!"

Hiram could almost have hugged the speaker, while Birdie in his excitement, cried:

"Keno!"

Obtaining leave to take the old fellow from his duty, they retired to their room with him, and cross-questioned the man, until, no longer able to contain his delight, Hiram jumped up, and shouted:

"Hurrah—I've got the clue, now!" then briefly related his history, which puzzled the darkey fearfully.

"Can't you see!" cried the boy, drawing a plan on the table. "Look there!"

COLONEL GARDINIER.

Has one daughter—	{ Evoline
Who marries—	{ Le Masney.
Their child—	{ Evoline,
Marries—	{ Joseph Revere.
These have three children—	{ Joseph
	{ Evoline
	{ Eunice.

"Can't you see, Mister?" he continued. "Old Colonel Gardinier is my great grandfather!"

"But de massa's dead," objected the negro. "He dead, an' de missis she dead too, an' de darter—young missis marry—so I hea—an' go way an' nebber come back, so Major Brewer, deir cousin, he take some ob de property—under ole massa's will, an' de place go to rack an' ruin."

"What do you call our place?" excitedly inquired Hi. "I'm the grandson of your old massa!"

The darkey glanced searchingly at him, then said:

"How I know you's not foolin' me?"

Opening the portrait and exhibiting the one inside, Hi answered:

"Isn't this the image of me?"

"Da's so!" murmured old Le Masney, as he was called, then, rising, he bowed saying:

"I'm only a poor old man an' yo' white folks has such ways wid ye, dat I'm never sure I'm right, but pears ter me yo' is honest—yo' has de Le Masney eyes! If all yo' say is so an' I don't doubt yo', I'd advise yo' to go right straight to Magnolia, near Walhalla, an' see General Beamish de great lawyer—he was the family lawyer of the Le Masneys—den if yo' wants me, I'll come on."

"Don't you know this man Crick?" said Hi. "Surely you remember such a person."

"Ki—yes!" chuckled the darkey, "course I do! Josephus Crick de watchmaker!" adding: "Wa' foolishness, chile, to call him a siller snif! He done do anything but peddle."

"How shall we reach Magnolia?" inquired Hiram, who was anxious to start right away.

"Wait till I 'quires 'bout 'mong folks, fo' de general," said the man. "De general is de one yo' wants," and away he went.

In a short time he informed them he could not obtain the information until Black Joe, who had been General Beamish's boy, returned from hunting, on which Hi purchased pen, ink and paper, and wrote a long account to Lillian's guardian, Lillian and Nelly.

It was two days ere Black Joe made his appearance, when they learned that the general had given up law, and was running a trading boat on the Santee River.

"He done go lower den Fort Motte, but trades from there right up to Magnolia," observed Joe. "If yo' want to catch him, yo' best buy a boat and sail from Fort Motte upwards. Yo' is sure to catch him da' way."

This advice was approved by the head-waiter, who called himself Julius Le Masney, and taking the cars for King's Valley, they started, Birdie in high spirits, but Hi feeling a strange pain the back of his head.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

AMONG THE MEAN WHITES.

In due time they arrived at King's Valley, where they learned that the general, who was well known all along the river, had started up from Fort Motte, two days previously, so, purchasing a boat, they prepared to set sail.

Placing their valises in the center and taking their seats aft, they started about noon; Hi, who was momentarily feeling worse, keeping his complaint to himself; however, that night, about eight o'clock, when in a lonely part of the river, he suddenly fell back and was presently seized with a violent sickness.

Making for the shore, Birdie ran to a shanty, that stood in a field near by, and knocked at the door, his summons being answered by a woman's voice, crying: "Hello! What you uns want?"

"My chum is sick and I want you to give him shelter," said Birdie.

"We uns ain't got no room," drawled the woman, coming to the door with a candle in one hand and a snuff brush in the other, which she lazily drew across her yellow teeth. "You uns best go on to Columbia."

Explaining that he would pay for Hi's accommodation, he finally got her to arouse a tall, homely-looking yaller-skin, who with the dog was sleeping in a corner of the den.

When the fellow was awoke he objected, as the woman had done until Birdie spoke of pay, when he pricked up his ears, shook himself, and accompanied the boy to the boat.

They found Hi delirious, raving about Nelly and his old life at Mr. Dick's.

"Him's bad!" drawled the man.

"Well, jest get hold of him and help me carry him up to your place?" cried Frank.

"Say, what you uns going to give me?" demanded the man. "We uns aint so all-fired rich that we can turn our house into a hospital for nothing!"

"Oh, we've got money!"

"I'd like to see it!" granted the fellow, on which the lad produced his roll of bills and convinced him.

The loafer's eyes sparkled and he coveted the money right away, so taking Hi in his arms, he carried him up to his shanty, Birdie following with the oars, rowlocks and weapons.

"I want him well nursed and a doctor fetched!" he said, as the woman, snuff-dipper in hand, gaped at Hi. "Come, make up his bed!"

"We uns aint use to be ordered round by you Northern folks!" snorted the creature. "Tend to him yourself!" but, after whispering with her husband, she fixed the bed and Hiram was undressed and made as comfortable as the surroundings would permit.

"Now, you start off for the doctor!" urged Birdie, to the man, and after some delay the fellow went.

It was midnight ere they returned, and the doctor seemed to be much such another as their host.

To tell the truth, the fellow was not a physician at all, being merely another mean white, like the owner of the shanty.

"What do you think of my chum?" demanded Bird, as the new arrival chawed and watched the delirious boy.

The man did not reply—he could not tell, anyhow, and knew more of corn-whiskey than physic.

"You uns going shooting?" demanded their host, eyeing the rifles.

"Yes," said Frank.

"Lots of deer up my way!" observed the doctor.

"How about my chum?" asked the boy.

"He uns got a hard fever," grinned the man.

"You uns come back with me and get some physic."

"You must go," said the boy to their host. "I can't leave my chum."

"Darned if I go all that way to-night," said the man.

"Then the chap will die!" remarked the mock doctor.

After a whispered consultation, the man agreed to go, while the woman, who had never said a word, signaled Birdie that he had done right.

When they were out of hearing she said, using the we uns style of talking, that she wouldn't let him and the sick boy be murdered, and confessed that her husband was one of a gang, known on the Santee as "The Knifers," that they lived by robbing and murdering travelers and river-men, then explained that the fellow with him was not a doctor, but Long Jake, the captain of the crowd.

"Why did they want me to go with him?" demanded Bird.

"To separate you!" she said. "Young feller—you uns aint safe here. You'd best put out for Rigstown, five miles above here; or, better still, for Columbia, where there's a hospital."

They carried poor Hi down to the boat and gave him some medicine she had in the house, then Birdie returned for his weapons, leaving the woman in charge of his chum.

As he secured the oars, he heard the sound of horses galloping toward the shanty, so, seizing the rifles, the revolver, and the rowlocks, he rushed down to the landing.

"In you 'uns, git!" cried the woman. "The gang is after you. Keep to the right bank."

So he jumped into the stern of the craft, and, hoisting sail, stood out into the middle of the river.

In a little time he heard the thieves yelling, and knew that they had entered a dug-out, and were pulling after him.

It was pitch dark, and in his delirium, poor Hi repeatedly endeavored to throw himself overboard.

He was raving mad—one stage of the awful disease—yellow fever.

Luckily there was a good breeze, and the river was wide, so Birdie kept his sails close-hauled, and cut a corner of the bend above, leaving the rowers astern, but, not knowing the stream, kept right on.

The thieves must have guessed this, for, relanding, they ran along the bank of the river, and presently got ahead of him.

As he tacked, to avoid the dark bank, they let him have it from a lot of duck guns and rifles with which they were armed.

There was quite a crowd of them, all the gang being there.

The slugs and balls struck all about him, and one shot hit Hi on the hand.

"Stop!" cried Long Jake. "Stop, gold darn you uns' skin!"

Aiming for the voice, Birdie fired, and the robber fell, shot dead in his tracks.

This made the rest of the gang furious, and they opened a tremendous fire upon the boat, but did not get any reply.

"Jump for Goose-bend!" whispered the man in whose house the boys had sought shelter.

The gang, maddened with drink and the death of their leader, filed off along the bank, at a run, and, as the gray morning mists began to rise, ensconced themselves behind a clump of willow trees that fringed the river on the next bend.

They could see the boat coming flying up the stream, dead on for them; so, weapon in hand, calmly waited twenty odd men bent on murdering two poor boys.

"You uns can't miss him this time," whispered their new leader. "They uns have lots of money on them!"

CHAPTER XXIX.

BIRDIE COMES OUT STRONGER THAN EVER.

BIRDIE had learned something by being once fired at, so, instead of keeping right on to the bend, waited until he got within rifle range then started across for the other bank, his move being received by the men with shouts of anger and a furious, though wasted discharge of their weapons.

This did not worry him but Hi's condition did.

"If I can noly get him as far as Columbia," he muttered, watching the sick boy who one moment was lying livid and silent, and the next would flush and be raving about all manner of things.

Fortunately, the breeze freshened and the boat fairly flew before it.

About noon he began to see the spires of the city churches and by two o'clock was alongside a wharf, where he procured a carriage which took them to the hospital.

One thing was good, nobody appeared very much alarmed about catching the disease, as all there had suffered from it.

The doctors came and examined Hi, then inquired if he had any friends.

"Well—yes and no!" answered Birdie. "I'm his friend but it's doubtful whether he has any real relations!" adding, "Why do you ask?"

"Because his case is very serious!" replied one of the doctors. "He may or may not live! Are you his brother?"

"No, not his real brother, though I feel as if I was," said Frank.

"If you're afraid of catching the fever don't stay here," observed the gentleman. "We have lots of nurses."

"Afraid!" cried Birdie. "Yer just tell me what I've got ter do. I'll stick ter him and—if he dies—dern me I don't want ter live."

He was beginning to speak more like Hi, but when he became excited, would relapse into his old tramp talk.

The nurses had undressed the sick boy and placed him in bed, and the chief warden was making an inventory of Hiram's clothes, which were ordered to be burnt.

"Where's his money-belt and the picture?" inquired Frank as he watched them make a bundle of the garments. "Don't burn them."

"What money-belt and picture?" said the man, in a surprised tone. "He had none upon him."

Birdie thought for awhile, then, remembered the woman, and blamed himself for leaving Hi with her; however it was no good crying over spilt milk, so he did not worry about that but set to work nursing his sick chum.

It was a tough job, and for seven days and nights Frank Bird was "up all the time" tending his friend, but, finally, Hiram showed signs of a change for the better, and in a fortnight was well enough to know folks.

When he could safely leave him, Birdie went to a hotel where he had sent their baggage and turned in for a day's rest; after which he wrote, reporting progress to the judge and Nelly's guardian, also sent a long letter to his mother, then returned to the hospital, where he found Hi sitting up.

"Where's my picture?" demanded the invalid.

In the old time Birdie would have put him off with a lie, but now he came out square and honest, while our hero, who had really done much to master himself, did not begin to rave and snarl, merely observing:

"I'm awfully sorry."

"So am I!" said Frank. "I can't tell you how bad I feel, but—you bet—I'm going to get them for you, chum!"

"Birdie," quietly replied the sick boy, "I insist upon your not doing anything so foolish! They'd murder you!"

"Don't you worry 'bout that," said the other with a knowing nod. "I'm going to pay them cusses a visit and to get that portrait and your money, or my name ain't Birdie! It was my fault that she had a chance to steal it, and I'm going to make her give it up!"

"Birdie, you shan't," pleaded Hi. "At least promise me you'll wait until I am well enough to go with you, now do."

Hi pleaded so hard that, finally, Birdie agreed, after which the invalid was moved out into a piazza fronting on the market place, where the folks, white and colored, were watching the antics of a trained bear.

All of a sudden Frank clutched his friend's arm, and, pointing at the crowd, cried:

"There she is, the woman!"

"What woman?" demanded Hi.

"The one who robbed you," replied Birdie.

Sure enough it was the mean white woman, evidently enjoying herself, as with one hand she dipped snuff and with the other she encouraged the bear.

Proceeding to the chief surgeon's room Frank rapidly told his story, and was advised by the gentleman to at once proceed to the police station.

"And let her slip through my fingers—oh, no!" he muttered, after which, examining the caps of his revolver and cocking it, he hid the weapon in his bosom and sauntered out.

The bear was dancing, and the woman, who was slightly intoxicated, was crying out, encouragingly, to it, when Birdie quietly slipped up to her, and producing his revolver, drew a bead on her, saying, in his old tramp style:

"Come—yer jis han' over—hear? I wants der picture an' money."

She was so bewildered that she did not know what to do, and gaped at him like a fool; while the crowd, among whom were several of the Knifers, fell back to the right and left.

"If yer don't han' over, gee-sharp, I'll give yer all der seven barl's!" he hissed, on which her hand slowly sought her bosom, and she whispered:

"Don't—shewt—you uns!" then, withdrawing a rag-wrapped package from her dress, tremblingly handed it to him.

The husband was among the crowd, and had wondered at Birdie tackling her, being ignorant of her theft which she had kept to herself; however, on seeing the parcel, he came blustering forward, saying:

"Give that back—hear, you uns;" but Birdie was slowly retreating toward the hospital-entrance and had "fight in his eye."

Unslinging his rifle the brigand was about to raise it, when Bird drew on him and fired, striking the fellow on the shoulder and causing him to drop his rifle.

A string of oaths came from the mouths of the man's friends and "bang—bang!" in quick succession, came two rifle shots, the ball of which fringed in close proximity to the boy's head and were most promptly returned by him.

He was holding the parcel in his lame hand, for he had not quite recovered the use of his broken arm, while with his right he rapidly fired at the bandits, who now boldly advance to crowd him.

He backed and backed until he reached the veranda of the hospital, when he was suddenly drawn in and the main door was shut—keeping out his assailants.

Luckily he was dragged down a side passage, out of range, for, the next moment, half a dozen rifle-balls came spattering through the panels of the main door, then, afraid to meet the approaching police, the aroused ruffians made off and fled to their stronghold on the river. Their daring was something astounding, as Columbia is well provided with police, but these mean whites, too proud to work and lazy as sloths, are the curse of the country and do worse things than are here recorded.

When the enemy was away, Birdie rushed up stairs, and, handing the rag parcel to his chum, said:

"I tell yer, pal, it was tough work."

"You're a brave chap," said Hiram, his voice trembling with emotion. "You did that splendidly." Then, with nervous fingers, he untied the package.

There, safe enough, was the portrait with every cent of the money.

The woman had not dared to spend or change any of it, but was keeping it until she could slip away from the gang.

In a few moments the head surgeon came to them and, after complimenting Frank, said:

"Neither of you boys must quit the hospital until you leave it for good, and you must go from here secretly, as the Knifers will watch your boat and track you like blood-hounds."

"Let 'em track," calmly answered Bird. "They'll get it hotter next time."

CHAPTER XXX.

IN WHICH OUR BOYS MEET THE GENERAL.

It was not so bad to have to remain inside the hospital, as Frank's arm was painful and it had the needed care, but when he was pronounced quite well and fit to travel the boys had the boat brought down to a steamer wharf and, when the next ship came along, struck a bargain with the captain and in the teeth of the Knifers and the friends of the gang, were towed off up the river.

"We uns give give you uns up," snarled the bandits, as the lads, rifle in hand, sat in the stern of their boat and were towed triumphantly out of sight.

It was a glorious defiance—no sneaking off, but a start in broad daylight.

After being towed about ten miles and when well out of the Knotters' district, they paid the captain and cast off, crossing to a village where they hoped to find General Beamish.

"He gone leabe here a week," said one woman. "Specs yo' fine he at Summer Landing—'bout forty miles up," so trimming sail, they started.

Their boat, though going against the current, sailed very fast, and that evening they arrived at the landing, where they saw, moored, a housed-in-flat-boat, such as are used by peddlers.

Pulling alongside, they hailed the craft, and heard a voice inquiring:

"Well?"

"Is General Beamish aboard?" said Hi, who once more took the lead.

"He is," answered the voice, then opening a door in the side of the craft, the speaker added, "who are you?"

"Two boys who have chased you all the way from King's Valley," replied our hero.

"Leave your arms in your boat, and come aboard," said the general.

Doing as they were directed, the lads stepped on board the strange craft, which, inside, was filled up like a dry goods and grocery store, and after shaking hands with the owner, stated their errand.

"Sit down, anywhere," he observed, "you're about the ninety-ninth who have claimed to be children of the missing people. Mind you—I don't say that you're not the genuine ones, but I'm getting very cautious," after which he examined the pictures, and read the record on the back of one of the portraits.

He was a tall, stern, grizzled, handsome man, and one that nobody could not easily deceive.

After thinking awhile he began to question them, but finding that Birdie was merely his companion, presently spoke only to our hero; talking on until a cuckoo-clock, over-head, struck three A. M.

He was evidently interested, though he would not say that he believed Hiram to be Joseph Revere.

"Come, boys, to bed," he observed, as the bird uttered its third "cuck-oo!" Then, bidding them bring in their arms for the night and secure their boat, made them a shake-down under the counter, and retired.

As might be imagined, the boys soon fell asleep, and did not wake again until they heard the general calling his cook, steward and crew—a gigantic negro named Billy Hogg.

The latter was a ferocious-looking fellow, but at heart as good a soul as ever broke a corn-dodger.

After starting the fire, Billy cleared up the place, and, that done, made some slap-jacks, fried some bacon and boiled a pot of rye-coffee; to all of which the lads did full justice.

When the meal was over the general lighted a corn-cob pipe, and, after asking a score or two questions, observed:

"You are no doubt right about your being the son of the late Joseph Revere, but, first of all, before I could advise you, I'd like to see Joe Crick! You must know I was what your friend Julius would term, ole Massa Le Masney's lawyer—I only remember young Evoline as a child—but, if I can be sure that you are Joseph Revere, I can put you in the way of getting your estate back!"

"What estate?" cried Hi.

"Why, the old Gardiner place at Magnolia, the Le Masney estate!" quietly replied the general. "That fellow, Major Brewer, has it, and is working the part containing super-phosphates, but is letting the cotton land go to ruin!"

"Then there is a property here?" said Hi.

"Yes!" nodded the general. "There's land that can be sold for a hundred dollars an acre and land that isn't worth five cents, but can be made to pay by attention and labor! If you prove to be the heir—that is you and your sisters, I can show you the way to a fortune."

"How about finding Crick?" inquired Hi.

"Oh—he's peddling on the other side of the stream!" said the general. "Sail over and ask him to tell you what he knows!"

They entered their boat and started across the Santee which, just there, was pretty broad, while Billy got up steam for the flat-boat—dry-goods—and-grocery—store was a craft propelled by a screw, and presently the general up anchor and slowly puffed along shore to the next landing, while Hi and Birdie watched the fleecy clouds overhead and enjoyed the balmy air.

As they neared the other side they heard cries of pain and, sitting up in their boat, beheld a man astride of a craft that had evidently turned turtle.

"Help, help!" yelled the fellow.

"Luff a little, Bird," said Hi. "Luff and run to windward of him. He's got a lot of logs in tow," adding, after a moment, "by thunder he's surrounded with alligators."

As they ran up to him they found that one of the monsters had seized the poor fellow by his wide brogan, which was so tightly laced that it would not come off, while the brute's teeth were slowly entering the man's flesh.

"You hold on," said Hi, as he lowered the sail of the craft, while Birdie seized the boat-hook and swung her alongside the overturned boat.

Spite of this the alligator held on to the man, while, as may easily be imagined, the latter clung frantically to the keel of his craft.

At length the boys succeeded in each taking one of the sufferer's arms, and were drawing him shrieking in, when they saw that the monster also was coming aboard, fighting all the while as though it did not like it.

They hauled and hove and "yo-hea'd" and "yo-hoed," but, as the alligator was backing astern all the time, could not raise the man over the gunwale of their boat, besides which, they, several times, nearly capsize her.

The fact was the creature's teeth had got set in the soft cow-hide brogan, and could not readily be withdrawn.

"Oh, my—good Lord!" moaned the sufferer; "cut my leg off!" but Hi did not see that, and taking a small axe, leaned across the man and began to chop at the alligator's head.

The pain caused the poor brute to gasp, when in-board fell the man, while at the same instant the other alligators, swimming round, made a simultaneous attack upon the boat, lashing at it with their tails, and threatening to capsize it as they had done the other.

"Up sail—quick!" yelled Hi, and in two seconds they had left the monster astern.

CHAPTER XXXI.

OLD SARAH.

THE rescued man proved to be a little, weazened old fellow, as tough as wire.

As they sailed away from the spot where he had been so badly mauled by the alligators, he unlaced his brogan and showed six big holes in his foot, which bled profusely.

"Can we bind it up?" asked Hi.

"No!" he answered. "Jes take me down to the next bend; there's a woman there, named Sarah, who can fix me!"

"What's your name?" inquired Birdie, as they struck the sail and settled themselves to row down stream.

"Josephus Crick!" he replied, tying a strong cord round his ankle, in order to check the flow of blood.

"Rah!" cried Hiram.

"What are you rah'in' fur?" demanded the man.

"Because I came here to find you!" excitedly returned our hero. "Never mind that—les' get your foot attended to!" whereupon the lads bent their backs to it and, spite of Hi's late sickness and Frank's weak arm, spun the boat along at a famous pace; meanwhile Crick, who was suffering intense pain; did not utter a moan or a word of complaint.

"Jerk her along," panted Hi, as Birdie slackened a little. "See, he's fainting."

They flew round the bend, and noticed that on their right there was a hut or two, while on their left they saw several surrounded by a dense undergrowth.

"What's ter be done, pal?" exclaimed Frank, when a passing negro, towing a raft laden with melons, hailed them, saying:

"Wa' yo' wan' to go, honies?"

"We want to find Sarah," said Hi. "This man, here, is sick."

"Bin bitten by an alligator," put in Birdie.

"Kil!" ejaculated the man. "Yo' don' say!" then turning and pointing to the right, drawled: "Sarah lib in de fus house, yo' hurry, honey, or she don' gon' out."

The boys put their bow on and soon ran alongside the bank, then, raising the insensible man, carried him ashore.

On reaching Sarah's cabin, they found her preparing a lot of herbs in an earthen pot, the fumes of the mess smelling very strong.

When she saw Crick she came forward, and, raising him in her arms, said:

"Wa' done this—now? How he come so—chile?"

"The alligators went for him and we saved him!" replied Hi.

"De good Lawd!" she murmured, placing the man on a rude couch, after which she untied the string about his leg and let him bleed awhile.

"Aint that rather rough on him?" observed Hi, as the blood oozed out of the holes in the sufferer's foot, on which Sarah mumbled:

"It's de Le Masney voice!" then, turning to him, demanded:

"Wa' yo' name, honey?"

"Hi Hildreth!" he said. "But I believe I'm Joseph Revere!"

Going to an old trunk she took out a pickle-bottle, containing some powdered herb like green dust, then, wiping Crick's foot, sprinkled it thickly with the stuff and bound it tightly, saying, "Da' stop de bleeding!"

"What do you call that?" asked Hi.

"Dat's de warra power!" she quietly answered. "Da's one ting de white doctors don' kno'! I tell yo' dey done kno' ebery ting!" then, turning and gazing searchingly in his face, added, "Who is yo', chile—yo' talk like a Le Masney—yo' got de Le Masney eyes!"

Hiram told his story but all the woman said, by way of reply, was:

"Hum—hum."

After a short time, Crick revived, and, sure enough, the blood had ceased to flow.

Hi did not wish to question either him or the old woman until Crick was strong again, but the man soon recovered, when our hero related his story and produced the portraits, saying:

"Have you ever seen this before?"

"I guess I have," he said. "I never had but one of them and I sold that to Sarah's young missis—oh—years and years ago. The lady was just married and was going away to Paris, and I made ten dollars out of that the ere portrait-case."

"Good enough," cried Hi. "Now, as soon as your foot is well, I want you to go with me up the river. I'm Joseph Revere, son of Evoline Le Masney."

As he uttered these words Sarah rushed at him and, throwing her arms about his neck, gave him a hearty kiss, crying:

"I know'd it, I know'd it! Now dat Major Brewer git de gran' histe fo' shwa. De Lord be praised! Where is yo' mudder and fadder, honey?"

"In the grave," sadly replied Hiram. "I never knew them; the people who ought to have brought us home, put us in a Foundling Asylum."

"What has become of your mother's diamonds?" asked Crick. "She had a fortune in them, left by her grandmother. I know this for I've seen them."

"I can't say," answered Hi; "I know very little of my relatives."

"Yo' bes' see de family la'ya, General Beamish," said Sarah. "Yo' see I get my freedom de day Misses Evoline marry; I dunno much bout yo' fadder, chile."

She was still holding his hands while the tears were coursing down her black face.

"I shall be able to travel to-morrow, and with this wind, your boat will soon overtake the general," observed Crick, adding: "I'm a ruined man now—don't care much where I go."

"Ruined?" inquired Birdie, "what ruined you?"

"Them derned alligators," he replied; "I was sailing down the river, when I saw one of them asleep, and like a fool, as I passed, tried to kill it with an ax, when it went for me and turned my boat over; this brought a whole lot down on me, and the result was I nearly lost my life."

"But how were you ruined?" demanded Hi.

"Well, all my stock in trade is at the bottom of the Santee River," mournfully answered the old man.

"When I've paid my creditors, I shant be worth a dime."

"And you mean to pay them?" said Hi.

"Mean," he cried. "You bet I do, if it takes my bottom dollar."

The boy did not ask any more questions, but, in his mind, put Josephus Crick down as an honest man.

As they had part of a day before them, the boys thought they would go shooting.

"There's plenty of deer round this section," remarked the man. "If you're fond of gunning, run your boat up the next creek and wait until the bucks come down to drink—just before sunset."

The boys cleaned up their rifles, and doing as they were directed, soon arrived at the deer licks, leaving Crick and Sarah to chat over the wonderful news.

Mooring their boat under some overhanging leaves that formed a regular "blind," they sat and watched for their victims.

As the sun declined, a big, handsome buck came slowly down the glade, on the opposite side, then, descending to the brink of the river, began to drink.

CHAPTER XXXII.

IN WHICH THE BOYS GET BADLY LOGGED.

THE boys were all excitement, having never before seen a live deer, but they did not fire until several of the beautiful animals came and joined the buck, then, each selecting his prey, pulled.

For some seconds the smoke hung about them, but when it cleared away, they presently saw the noble, antlered deer and a fat doe struggling in the water.

Pushing across the stream, they secured their prizes, and, after bleeding them, landed and hung the bodies on a tree.

"If I come in for my property, we'll often go deer shooting," said our hero. "Say, Birdie, it ain't dark yet—s'pose we follow them critters and try for another shot?"

He did not remember that down there, almost as soon as the sun dips, darkness comes on.

"I'm agreeable," answered his chum, and away they went up the glade.

After awhile it grew more and more dusk, and, as they could not see, the lads turned, but, missing a divide in the track, walked into a bog—soon sinking up to their knees.

"Here, back out of this," cried Hi, and, by dint of great exertion, they at length reached solid land.

"What's to be done?" murmured Bird, moving cautiously forward, when, all round them they heard the "burr burr" of rattlesnakes.

Feeling in his pocket for a match, Hi struck a light, and setting fire to the dry grass, saw that they were on a sort of hillock in the swamp and were completely surrounded with snakes, some of which were moving, and the others coiled up.

Instead of turning completely round, the lads had backed out to the right, on to a small, dry knoll, or island, known as "The Snakes' Nest" and were right in among a regular colony of the reptiles.

"This is pleasant," growled Birdie, grimly surveying the scene. "We can't stir for the brutes!"

In a second more one match was burnt out, and Hi had lighted another.

Some of the snakes, attracted by the flames, rose on their bellies and made towards them, when the boys noticed that, on a sort of lump in the center of the island, there was a big heap of driftwood and grass, left there in the spring when the river flooded its banks.

Advancing, light in hand, he applied it to the pile, whereupon it blazed up and they saw hundreds of snakes pour out of it, some being four feet long and others longer.

The place well deserved its name.

There were rattle snakes, black snakes, copper-heads, moccasins, vipers, yellow-heads and rat-tails in dozens, and, what was most wonderful, after quitting the fire, all of them turned and attacked it—even those lying loose round moving towards it and going for the light.

Snakes are like moths, at night they will dart at a flame, retreat, when they are burnt, and immediately resume the attack.

The boys looked on in amazement, and, finally, became so bold that, seizing sticks, they would pick up a big rattler, as it recoiled from the fire, and pitch it back.

After enjoying this fun awhile, Birdie suggested that they should use the light to guide them back to the track.

"Well, yes!" said Hi. "It would be as well!" Then, picking up a fat copper-head, that was rapidly moving towards the swamp, he tossed it back and began to look out for the best means of getting off the knoll.

"See them black things moving this way?" whispered Birdie. "Them's alligators."

"Well, we don't want any of their company," calmly answered Hi. "Let's try this way?" pointing in the opposite direction.

As they started they heard a loud shout of:

"Hi you b'ys!"

"Hello!" bawled Hiram. "Who's that?"

"Sarah," answered the voice.

"We're coming," shouted Hi, selecting a nice, dry-looking track that ended in a regular ridge.

Unfortunately this was only a dried surface of moss, the roots of which were eight feet below in the peaty swamp.

No sooner had they trusted the entire weight of their bodies to the treacherous surface than in it went, and they slowly began to sink.

"Go ahead, Hi," said Birdie.

"I wish I could," murmured the other. "I'm going down."

"Draw one foot up gently," urged his chum.

"I can't," groaned Hiram; "I'm sinking fast."

"Let's shout for Sarah," suggested Frank, and shout they did.

"I'm coming," she cried. "Don't you make a noise, honies."

It was some moments ere she reached them, and when she appeared on the bank above, they saw that she was carrying a lighted pitch-pine knot.

By that time Hi had sunk up to his waist, and Birdie was somewhat deeper immersed.

"Oh, good Lawd!" groaned Sarah, "wa' yo' don go dere fo', children? Don't you move, honies."

"No fear of that," said Hi, as, sticking the pine-knot in the ground, she ran off.

"Feel any bottom where you are, Hi?" inquired his chum.

"Nary," said the other. "I believe this is a bottomless pit."

"I'm an inch deeper now than when she came," said Birdie. "Let's make an effort."

"Make an effort be—hanged!" growled Hi. "What's the good of making an effort when you're sinking fast? You'll only settle all the deeper."

But Birdie was not to be advised, so putting forth all his strength, he moved a foot forward and sank six inches lower, after which he observed, in a despairing tone:

"You're right, Hi. Guess I'll say my prayers and prepare for the worst!"

It was an awful time, and the minutes seemed like days.

Hi was up to his arm-pits and Birdie was almost over his shoulders.

Presently they beheld, slowly, half-swimming half-crawling along the soaky surface of the bog, several long, dark-looking objects.

These were alligators, drawn thither by the light and scenting the boys as dogs do game.

By that time all thoughts of joking were at an end and the lads were praying.

As they neared the roots of the moss they sank more slowly—the mass being more dense below—still they were gradually being sucked down.

In vain they shouted for Sarah, no reply came and the noise only made the alligators pause for a moment.

"They will attack us, and we shall not be able to move!" moaned Birdie. "Here we are fixed, and they can chew our heads off."

"Chum," said Hiram, "if we've got to go, don't let us howl and cry! God bless you Birdie."

"You're right, Hi," answered the boy, whose chin was level with the top of the bog. "God bless yer too, old pard, we die together!"

CHAPTER XXXIII.

HI HEARS AN ANGEL SING.

BEING up to your chin in a quaking bog is no joke, and in a few moments more Birdie's and Hi's careers would have been forever ended, when, fortunately, Sarah hove in sight, while behind her came a crowd of negroes, armed with ladders, axes, poles and ropes. It was tough work getting a line around Birdie's body, but, finally, they accomplished it, and though they almost dragged him in halves they got him on shore, after which they landed Hiram.

No two fellows under the gallows ever felt more sure of death than our boys had done, or were more delighted to get off clear.

Accompanying Sarah and the negro laborers down to their boat, they embarked, the men following with the deer.

"Our shooting nearly cost us our lives," said Hi, as they slowly sailed down the stream. "How came you to think of searching for us, Sarah?"

"Well—Masr Crick got kinder uneasy," she replied, "so I started out after you, den I hear you shoutin', an' know suthin' was de matter."

"We fell in with a regular settlement of snakes," said Birdie. "An island chock full of them."

"Yo' don't say yo's bin on Snake Island?" she cried.

"I don't know what you call it, but there were snakes enough there to last me a lifetime," he answered, adding, "I've had enough of these parts."

When they reached Sarah's cabin they found Crick much alarmed on their account, and, on hearing their story, he said:

"You ought to thank God for saving your lives," on which Sarah, Hi, Birdie and the negress knelt, while Crick, who was a religious man, joined them in their prayer of thanksgiving.

Josephus was a man who was not ashamed of his faith.

That night they slept well, and the next morning started on their way, the old woman saying, as they bade her adieu:

"Bran' yo' be de best of good boys, but yo' Mas-

sa Joseph," meaning Hi, "is de one fo' ole Sarah. Lor' love yo', honey, an' sen' yo' may get yo' rights."

"I'll come back and fetch you some day, Aunt Sarah," said Hiram. "I won't forget you."

They set sail, and keeping the right bank, ran up the river, while Crick, who was resting his wounded foot, said:

"Hiram I've been thinking over your story, and I've no doubt but that you're Joseph Revere. I hope you did not get those portraits wet in the bag?"

"No," he answered. "When I found myself sinking, I placed my money and the pictures in the crown of my hat."

"Good," said the old man; then, continuing the conversation, remarked: "I can't think where your father and mother met those people, his servants—the ones mentioned in that hotel bill. They never came from hereabouts."

"Well, we're getting the ravel out," said Hi. "You can swear that you sold my mother this portrait-case, Sarah can give good evidence, Julius, the waiter at the hotel, can aid us, and the general knows all the case—so I feel good over this."

"Don't be too sanguine," remarked the old man. "You've got a hard nut to crack in Major Brewer. He has the property under the Le Masney will, and won't give it up."

"We'll see," said Hi.

About noon they sighted the general's boat, and in half an hour were alongside it.

They related their adventures, and Crick was provided with a sofa, after which they had a long consultation with the lawyer, who, finally said:

"I tell you what I'll do—I'll leave my business in the hands of Joe Crick and go to Magnolia with you, but, in future, you, Hiram, must assume your true name, Joseph Revere, for without doubt, you are that person."

After everything was settled, the general, Hi and Birdie entered the boat, and making sail, ran up the river for Magnolia near Wajhalla; stopping at dusk at some place for the night and resuming their journey at sunrise.

During these days—for it took them over a week to make the distance—the gentleman learned every incident of our hero's life, and became more and more convinced that he was the genuine Joseph Revere.

At last, on the eighth morning since quitting the general's craft, they came in sight of Magnolia, which was situated on the right bank of the Santee.

"What a lovely spot," cried Hi, as they rounded the last bend. "The river runs between two cliffs. Is that cotton land on the top?"

"Yes," sadly answered the general. "In your grandfather's day this district produced twenty thousand bales of cotton—of which he raised ten thousand."

"What is that grand ruin up there?" demanded Hiram, pointing to a stone and brick edifice on their right.

"That is the old Gardinier mansion," replied the general. "There's an avenue of cotton-wood trees, two miles long, leading up to it from the east."

"I'd like to see it," said the boy; then observing a new, pretentious-looking wooden house about a mile ahead, demanded: "and whose place is that?"

"Your cousin's, Major Brewer's," said the other. "He dared not live in the old house."

"Why not?" murmured Hi.

"Well, you see," smilingly answered the general, "the colored folks here all swear by the Le Masney family, they hate the Brewers, and if the major had endeavored to reside in the old mansion, the chances are they would have driven him out, perhaps have killed him."

"Will they object to me?" asked Hi.

"Oh, no," said the general. "You're a Le Masney; they will welcome you back with great delight, but they won't have anything to do with the Brewers."

"I'm glad they won't go for you, Hi," observed Birdie, adding, "you bet they'll like your sisters!"

"Shall we call on the major right away?" said our hero.

"Oh, no," replied the general. "We must do this in a lawful way. Until the time comes I shall be glad to have you as my guests. That is my wharf," pointing to a dilapidated landing-place, beyond which was a sloping meadow, and on the top of the bank a decently-kept house; by which we mean that the windows were whole and the clapboards tolerably sound.

In the old times the place had been a sort of summer residence, but now it was the general's house, and as far as real estate went, his sole property.

Proceeding up the pasture they entered the veranda and were presently in a large, cool reception-room; whereupon, ringing a bell, the general summoned an old negro woman, to whom he said:

"Chloe, tell your mistress that I have returned, and that I have brought two visitors."

"Glad to see you back, massa!" mumbled the old lady, who was the very picture of colored neatness. "Miss Dollie says she jes' hungerin' fo' a sight ob yo' face," saying which she hobbled off.

In a few moments the door was again opened, but this time, in lieu of the old woman, there entered a lovely girl of sixteen, tall, for her age, womanly, and as beautiful as dark eyes, with long, black, dreamy lashes, jetty hair, curling naturally over a beautifully molded face, and perfect form could make a human being.

"My daughter!" cried the general, then, introducing Hi, added:

"This, my dear, is Joseph Revere, and this," indicating Birdie, "is his friend, Frank Bird."

Both lads bowed and smiled, while Hi's heart was all of a tremble. He had loved Nelly and Lillian as a brother, but he felt that he could worship Dollie; whose real name, by the way, was Doretha.

They dined and supped; then, after the last meal was over, the girl seated herself at the piano and sang

"Way down upon the Swanee Ribber," and a number of other well-known airs, while Hi sat, open-mouthed, and listened.

As the chums retired that night, he remarked to Birdie: "I've heard an angel sing!"

CHAPTER XXXIV.

IN WHICH HI MEETS HIS SECOND COUSIN.

ON the following day the general went through the usual formalities of the law and served Major Brewer with a notice, calling upon him to account for the Le Masney estate to the heirs Joseph, Evoline and Eunice Revere, at the same time informing him that the youth, named in the demand, was at Magnolia, and would like to have an interview with him.

Major Brewer had always been known as a fire-eater, so General Beamish concluded to take the bull by the horns.

The summons had the desired effect, and that afternoon the major rode over to the general's house, where he was politely received.

Tall, wiry, muscular, thin, and keen of feature, Brewer was at once commanding-looking and forbidding; one that, if he got good hold on anything, was not likely to relinquish his grasp.

After being introduced to Hi, he listened to his request, as set forth by the general, then, bowing his head, observed:

"If this is so, and, for argument's sake, I will not doubt it, I am perfectly ready to relinquish the estate, but, until you can prove that youth to be my second cousin, I must retain the Gardinier place. I am childless. I like the looks of that boy," pointing to our hero, "but I am a man of the world, and, unless I am sure I hold it wrongfully, will not relinquish a large fortune. Of course, I do not say anything against these claimants, but not until they can bring legal proof that they are the children of my cousin, will I give over a foot of land, or a dollar of money," saying which, he rose, and bowing to the general and Hiram, quitted the house.

"He means fight," observed the boy, watching the major as the latter mounted his horse and rode off.

"I do not think so, not in your sense of taking it," answered the lawyer. "He astonishes me. Well, I believe what he says—if we can prove you to be Joseph Revere, he will give up his charge, but, unless we can, he will treat you as impostors."

"What is to be done?" murmured Hi. "Both the count, as he called himself, and Mrs. Raymond are dead. I don't see how we are to prove anything."

"Stay," mused the general. "You must trace your parents' journey to Paris—follow them every step of the way—learn where they engaged their servants and, if possible, when they died."

"It will take years!" snapped Hiram.

"Don't be so impulsive," quietly answered the lawyer. "Something may turn up and give a clue that will unravel all."

"I understand," said the boy. "I did not mean to show my temper. I try hard enough to master myself."

As he spoke Dolly entered the room, and for the moment Hi forgot his troubles.

"Papa," she observed, "does not Mr. Revere wish to visit his grandfather's house?"

"Yes," nodded the general. "Now that we have seen Major Brewer we will go over to the old Gardinier place, and Joseph shall see the halls of his ancestors."

"Can I go too?" asked Birdie, who hitherto had kept very quiet.

"Oh, certainly," answered the general. "Can you both ride?"

"I can," said Hi, remembering Spearman's horses.

"So can I," merrily answered Frank.

"Well then," continued their host, "we will wait until after dinner, then ride over."

"You're not afraid of witches, are you, Mr. Revere?" inquired Dolly of Hi, as they seated themselves at the table.

"Oh, no," said the boy, adding: "Why do you ask me such a question?"

"Because the house is haunted by a witch, whom the colored folks call Jumba," she laughingly replied. "She hates the major, and that is probably why he was afraid to live there. You see she has great power over the colored people, and being an old Gardinier negress, believes that she is keeping the house for them, as she did sixty years ago. We call her the witch."

"How very strange," said Hiram. "It sounds like a romance from a book."

"Yes," she said. "When I heard your story I thought of Jumba. If she takes to you, all right; if not, the colored folks will be hard to convince."

"I'll do my best and be polite to her," replied Hi. "She may be able to give me some points. Was she housekeeper to my grandfather and grandmother?"

"Yes," answered Dolly. "She was housekeeper to old Colonel Gardinier, then to the Le Masneys, remaining there after they died, waiting, so she said, for the return of your father and mother from France. She's a wonder, is Jumba, and how she lives, heaven only knows."

"Oh, the old Le Masney hands supply her with food," remarked the general. "I forgot her when I was telling Joseph about his ancestors' tomb."

Hi liked to be called Joseph; it seemed like getting his rights.

Mounting their horses, they rode towards the ruined mansion, passing through miles and miles of cotton land, which was running to riot and waste.

"Major Brewer only cares for his super-phosphates," said Dollie. "He does not believe in cotton."

"If we get this estate for you," remarked the general, "you will be able to make a big fortune!"

"Won't you give us a share, chum?" it laughingly whispered Birdie, by way of joke. "It used to be shares, didn't it?"

"I'll look after you!" nodded Hiram, remembering how, in the old time, Birdie used to share by taking his all; and what a change for the better had overtaken him.

On they rode, until, presently, they emerged from the highway into a grand avenue of gigantic old cotton-wood trees.

"Oh, how lovely," cried the boys, simultaneously reining in their horses; and truly it was a beautiful sight, one grand, long tunnel, the trees arching overhead, and forming a leafy bower.

"Come!" cried Dollie, giving her horse a pat, "I will race you up the avenue," and away they galloped, four abreast.

For half a mile the horses kept pretty even, but finally the general reined his a little and Birdie did the same, permitting Dollie and our hero to lead.

"I'd like to ride on with you to the end of the earth," said Hi, as he glanced admiringly at his lovely companion.

Dollie smiled and returned the look, thinking that she never had seen a handsomer face or met with a more dashing fellow than Hi.

"Wouldn't they make a nice, splendid couple?" remarked Birdie to the general.

The latter smiled but did not reply.

On galloped the lovers, but when within a hundred yards of the house, their horses were startled and themselves somewhat scared by a weird looking figure suddenly emerging from behind the trees and standing in the midst of the avenue, then, with outstretched arms, crying:

"I hear him—I hear him! Thank God, he come at last. Massa Joseph! Massa Joseph!" then fell as though fainting.

CHAPTER XXXV.

JUMBA KEEPS HER WORD.

Uprode the general and Birdie, while Hi, who had dismounted, was supporting the old woman whom he had partly raised from the ground.

It was Jumba.

Unclosing her sunken eyes, and passing her withered hands over her wrinkled features, so as to remove the straggling snowy wool that hung in fleecy masses over her face, she gasped:

"Wa' he be—Massa Joseph?"

"I'm here," said Hi.

Rising to her feet she grasped him by both hands, peered into his eyes, and said:

"Yous voice is de voice ob young Revere, but you has de true Le Masney face and eyes. Yous de young missus' chile."

"Yes," said Hiram, who was much overcome. "I am Joseph Revere. I want you to help me get my rights."

Falling upon her knees, the old creature kissed his hand, saying:

"De good Fadder hear old Jumba's prayers. I no die until you gets de old place." Then, rising, motioned him to follow her, muttering: "In by de gran' entrance, like a true Le Masney as yo' is," after which drawing a massive key from her rags, she unlocked the hall-door, and curtsying negro fashion, cried in a quavering voice: "Welcome to your own house, Joseph Revere! I have kep' it fo' yo', chile!"

Poor Hi, the tears came thick and fast as he surveyed the ruin of what had been his mother's house. Time and the war had almost completely wrecked the grand old mansion, still the walls, of good stone and brick, were sound, though windows, floors, stairs and fittings, had been broken up for fuel or were rotting with age.

"De furniture mos' a' gone," said Jumba, as though apologizing for the absence of chairs, etcetera, adding, "but I kep one room fo' yo', my sweet massa!" with which she picked her way up the broken grand stairs and ushered him into what had once been his mother's boudoir.

Here the flooring was sound and the windows stuffed with rags or fitted with paper in lieu of glass, while a dozen old pieces of furniture made the place look somewhat habitable.

"Sit down, honey," she said, pointing to a seat. "I want to know all about yo's mudder."

"Cannot I bring my friends here?" he asked. "You know General Beamish, the family lawyer—and his daughter—the other is my good friend, Frank Bird, who nursed me through the yellow fever!"

"Let 'em come," she nodded. "Lawyer Beamish he too honest, chile—he da'ter is jes perfect—an' yo' know yo's friend. Yes, let 'em come."

Hiram went down and summoned his companions, then returned with them and when they were seated, Jumba squatting on the floor negro-fashion, said:

"Jus' hea' me, chile. When old massa die, missus say, 'Why my chile no come back from Paris. Den she tell me, jus' afoa she die, 'Jumba, come what may, yo nebber gib up dis house to any one. I believe my Evoline is dead, but she has two children, so, if harm come to her, day may lib to claim deir own.' Then raising her hands to heaven, she solemnly added, 'God knows, I keep de trust she gib me! Jus' dat magna man, Major Brewer, come hea, order me to quit, I say No! I will not go! Den de troops bof sides, come say, yous git—yo clear out—but Jumba stick hea, now, when yo' gits ye' own, chile. I can lie down an' die an' my soul can go to ole massa an' missus, an' when I see dem, Jumba will not be 'shamed, but will stan' up an' say: I se done my bes', honies.'"

Hiram was greatly touched by this speech, and Dollie shed tears, while the general glanced away and wiped his eyes, and Birdie sniffed, as though scarcely able to restrain his emotion.

After awhile, during which time nobody spoke, Jumba said, turning to Hi:

"Now yo' tell me all yo' know—chile?"

Hiram briefly related his history and produced the locket, then, exhibiting both portraits, said:

"What do you think of these?"

The old woman kissed the picture of Nelly and Evoline and replied:

"My lily Misses Le Masney!"

"My sister, Evoline!" said Hi.

"An' dis is like wa' yo' fadder was—honey!" said Jumba, glancing at Hi's portrait. "But how came yo' in de hous' ob strangers?"

"Did you know my father's servants?" demanded Hi.

"Wait, chile," she mumbled, going to a clothes-chest that stood by the stove. "When yo' granmudder died she gib me some letters, sayin', 'if Evoline or her husband come back, or deir children, gib dem dese,' with which she produced a bundle of faded letters, and two, in envelopes, that had never been opened, then pointing to the latter said: "Dese come for ole massa, one on de day ole missus died, and de odder tree mun's after. I no want dat ting, Major Brewer, to hab um, so I keep dem."

Hi took them, then said:

"I know this writing. It is in the count's hand," and tearing the first one open, read:

"NEW YORK, Oct. 1, 18—.

"MONSIEUR LE MASNEY:—"If you wish to learn anything of the children of your daughter Evoline, address,

"COUNT MONTALO,

"Astor House."

Then, opening the other, read:

"NEW YORK, Jan. 17, 18—.

"MONSIEUR LE MASNEY:—"I have to inform you that the children of your late daughter are dead."

"MONTALO."

The old negress listened, then observed:

"He lie, whoebber he am."

"Those letters are links in our chain of evidence," remarked the general. "Now, Joseph, read your mother's letters, for I see the others are in her well-known writing."

Untying the string, he read, one after the other, the loving epistles written by his dead mother to his grandparents, they being dated as follows:

"Oct. 6, from Golden Grove, (two days after the lady's marriage.)

"Oct. 13, from Columbia.

"Oct. 17, from Charleston.

"Nov. 10, from New York."

In this letter the lady writes:

"I have engaged, as maid and companion, a young girl named Helen Raymond, who comes from Poughkeepsie, on the Hudson, and Joseph has secured her lover, a young man who speaks French, named Walter Mount."

In all the other letters the names of Helen and Walter constantly appeared, after learning which, the general observed:

"We've got the right clue now, Joseph."

CHAPTER XXXVI.

MORE DISCOVERIES AND A TERRIBLE RIDE.

WITHOUT knowing it, Jumba had saved most important evidence.

After carefully perusing the letters, the general said: "Now, if we could only raise the dead for awhile, or get some written confession left by the count or that woman, Helen Raymond, every link in the chain would be complete."

"How are you to make these out, sir?" demanded the boy. "I can't see how they do more than show that the servants were engaged in New York."

"This is what they tell me," replied the general. "The man and woman, the latter a Poughkeepsie girl, and engaged to be married to the former, were hired in New York, were in France with your parents, and with them when they died; that they stole your mother's diamonds—worth a large sum, then endeavored to get rid of you by making a bargain with your grandparents—unfortunately the latter was dead. Finding no reply came, they placed you in the Foundling Asylum, with Helen or rather Evoline, your sister, keeping the other child, a babe, themselves. That's how I unravel it."

"You haven't quite got it," said Hi. "In the first place why should the man employ the gypsy to kill me, and the woman take Helen and say she was her child? Why write and offer to let grandfather know where we could be found, then to say that we were dead?"

"Give it up," said the general.

"Why don't you go to Po'keepsie right away?" suggested Dollie.

"Do you think that Major Brewer had any thing to do with this?" said Birdie.

"No," answered the general, "I do not. With all his faults the major would not condescend to lie and plot against his own flesh and blood."

"Oh, he bad, bad!" ejaculated Jumba, who evidently detested the man whom she considered a usurper. "He no care wha' he do so long he keep de ole Gardinier place."

The general and boys climbed all over the house, and at the risk of their necks ascended to the attic, where Jumba said she had hidden a parcel sent by her "young misses" from France, but which arrived after her old mistress died.

"It's all coming out," whispered Hi, to the general.

"As Jumba remembers we shall get at everything."

Presently reaching the top floor—Dollie and the old negress being left below—they cautiously walked along the rafters and began to hunt for the corner where the package was stowed.

The timber on which they stood was so rotten that they feared to move, particularly as they saw that the entire flooring had an inclination to sag and let them down into the space beneath.

All of a sudden Birdie spied a box, jammed in behind a chimney stack, evidently the package described by Jumba, so, moving forward, he was about to seize it, when the boards gave way under his feet, and let him through; not, however, before he contrived to grab at the box and pull it after him.

Raising a cloud of dust and decayed wood in his descent, he cried to those below:

"Look out!" and presently landed, bruised and scratched, in the apartment where sat Dollie and the old woman.

"Wa' yo' com' down da' wa' fo'?" nervously ejaculated Jumba, while Frank, picking himself up and rubbing his bruises, answered:

"Because I couldn't help myself," then, lifting the box, inquired of the negress: "Is that the package?"

"Yes!" she nodded.

As she spoke, the general and Hi safely descended and joined them, everybody laughing over Birdie's trouble and inquiring how he felt.

"Oh, I'm pretty well shaken up," he said, adding: "But there—I don't care, we've got the box."

"This is a day of surprises," observed Dollie, as Hiram cut the strings of the dust-encrusted parcel. "I am so glad we came."

Paper after paper, stained by the rains of many years, was removed, finally disclosing a tin box, neatly soldered, on which was scratched:

"MRS. LE MASNEY,

(OPEN WITH GREAT CARE.) "Gardinier Estate,

From

"Magnolia in Walhalla,

"Mrs. J. Revere,

"S. Carolina.

"Hotel Meurice—Paris."

"How are we going to open this?" inquired Hi, whose hands trembled as though he had the ague. "I'm afraid if we are not cautious we will damage the contents."

The box was made of very stout tin, and, as the boys had left their hunting-knives at home, all the instrument for opening possessed by the party was the general's penknife, which was soon broken.

"I want to see dat box undone," said Jumba.

"Suppose Joseph and I ride home and fetch a file and a sharp knife?" said Dollie. "We have no means of taking Jumba with us."

"Yes, go back and procure the articles," said her father. "Joseph will accompany you."

They started all right, but when halfway down the avenue Dollie's horse became restive, and, spite of all she could do, presently ran away with her; seeing which, our hero urged his animal to its greatest speed and was soon alongside her.

Then ensued a tremendous race, both horses being crazy with excitement, and perfectly indifferent to the struggles of their riders.

The animals fairly flew, and all the boy and girl could do was to hang on and hold tight to the reins.

With heads up, jaws open, ears erect, and eyeballs staring, the creatures galloped down the avenue, tossing the soft turf behind them in showers, and the foam flew from their mouths in clouds.

Upon emerging from the lane, in lieu of turning, they dashed across the road and up a steep hill that ended in a precipice—the bank of the Santee River.

"Head your horse to the left!" cried Dollie, as with a frantic effort she sawed at the bridle of her steed, but though Hi leaned back and threw all his weight upon the reins, his horse gave a wild snort and kept right on.

With tremendous strides and smoking flanks the terrified creatures tore up the hillside, the negroes working in the fields near by pausing in their occupation and moaning:

"Ki—dey be killed!"

On, on they flew, for it was a long up-stretch, never faltering or weakening, but every muscle and sinew in action, free, maddened, and blind to consequences.

Dollie was slightly ahead, riding splendidly with her hat off and her glorious black curls flying like silken pennants behind her, but fearless as a man.

Hi was to her right in a line with the pommel of her saddle, with his hat jammed over his eyes, his teeth set, lips compressed and every nerve strung to avert what he knew would be a horrible death.

On, on they raced; behind them a cloud of dust and flying clods, before them the sharp, clean, well-defined edge of the precipice.

"Good-bye!" gasped Dollie, as they neared the brink.

"Good-bye!" panted our hero.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

LIGHT AT LAST.

As the horses dashed up to the edge of the precipice, and when Hi and Dollie were literally on the brink of eternity, a negro, who had ascended the cliff by clinging hold of the shrubs that grew upon its side, suddenly mounted into view, and extending his black arms, so startled the horses that they wheeled clear round and began to gallop back, their actions unseating both boy and girl, who were thrown heavily upon the sward.

Luckily no bones were broken, and in two minutes Hi was on his feet, assisting Dollie to rise, while the horses, turning to the right, ran into a swamp and sank up to their knees, then paused from sheer exhaustion.

"All right, dear Dollie?" demanded Hi, as the young lady, who had risen and was resting her hand upon his

shoulder, leaned heavily upon him; but it was not so, the girl had fainted.

Not knowing what else to do, in order to revive her, our hero gently placed her upon the grass, then kissing her, said:

"Dollie, Dollie, it's all right now," and after awhile, had the happiness of seeing her open her eyes.

"Oh, Joseph!" she exclaimed, "what an escape we have had!" whereupon he kissed her again and said, "yes," and from that moment he was more to her than all the world and she became everything to him.

After awhile she timidly whispered:

"Won't you catch the horses and go home with me? Pa will be getting uneasy;" so he did as she asked and, aided by the negro who had been the means of saving their lives, secured the now humble animals; then, after assisting Dollie to mount, he gave the man five dollars and once more started for the general's house. Before quitting the hospital he telegraphed Nelly to address him at the lawyer's, so was, on arriving at the house, not surprised to receive a letter from his sister.

While Dollie procured a file, knife and small saw, Hiram opened the epistle and read as follows:

"WHITEHALL, Saturday Evening.

"MY DEAR BROTHER:—Your telegram received, and I was truly glad to know that you had fully recovered from that dreadful yellow fever.

"Since I wrote I have, I believe, made a discovery. You remember Mrs. Raymond's last words were 'my mother.' Well, that meant if we went to her mother we might learn something. I've thought and thought until I've come to this conclusion, and it is the solution of the mystery.

"I have written to sister Lillian and told her of this. Can't you find out who Mrs. Raymond's mother is?

"Mr. and Mrs. Dick send kindest regards, and with much love, believe me ever to be,

"Your devoted sister,
"NELLY."

"P. S.—I have met with such a nice gentleman here; his name is Barton."

"Oh—he!" laughed Hi. "Well, I think we can find out who Mrs. Raymond's mother is."

"Here's the saw and things," observed Dollie, entering the room, adding, "there's another letter for you here. It was lying under one of pa's on the table in the hall."

Handing Nelly's note to her to read, he tore open the other which was from Lillian, and ran:

"DEAR BROTHER:—We are terribly alarmed about you, but Nelly telegraphed us to-day that you are all right again. Still we are most anxious.

"How nobly Mr. Bird has behaved. I cannot tell you how thankful I feel to him. Give him my regards, and say I am so much obliged for his care of you.

"The judge sends best remembrance to you both. Return as soon as you can, and mind and bring Mr. Bird back with you.

"Your affectionate sister,
"LILLIAN."

"Pheugh!" he ejaculated, also giving Dollie that letter to read.

When she had perused it she returned them both, saying: "Do you know what Lillian's favorite song is?"

"No!" he innocently replied, as they proceeded out into the veranda, before which stood two fresh horses; then, aiding her to remount, added: "Do you?"

"Yes," she merrily answered, as they started at a gallop, "Lillian's favorite song now is—'I would I were a Bird.'"

"Good enough," laughingly answered our hero. "I'd have no objection to Frank as my brother-in-law, would you, Dorethea?"

"Well, no," she archly replied. "I think he's a real nice fellow."

They soon got over the distance and arrived at the ruin, where they found the general, to whom they related their adventure.

"Thank heaven you escaped," said that gentleman. "It would have been certain death for you had the horses kept on. But what started them?"

"A hornet," answered Dollie. "Jim, the groom, showed it to me; it was literally buried in my poor horse's flesh. Of course, when he got crazy, Joseph's animal followed."

Mutual congratulations ensued, and Hi told Birdie that Lillian had sent him her especial remembrance, which made him very happy.

Assembling again in Jumba's room, they placed the box on the rude table and cautiously proceeded to cut it open, the old negress watching them with the keenest interest.

By dint of using file, saw and knife, it was finally cut round, and the two parts separated, whereupon four packages, wrapped in pink tissue paper, fell out, and Hi drew a letter from the lower part of the case.

It was a note from his mother, written in a hurry from Paris, and accompanying three packages, one for her father, Mr. Le Masney, another for her mother, the third for Jumba and the fourth addressed:

"MRS. NOLAN RAYMOND,
"Nolan Homestead,
"Poughkeepsie."

"Eureka!" cried Hi. "There's jewelry in all of them."

"Gib me my parcel," demanded Jumba.

In another moment the tissue paper was torn from the old lady's package, and she exhibited a jewel-case in which was a four-fold locket, containing portraits of Hi's mother, himself, Nelly and a baby (Lillian), while on the back was engraved:

"To

"Dear Jumba

"From Euline and her three loved ones,
"Euline, Joseph and Eunice."

The other two packages contained gold-mounted miniatures of Mr. Revere, his wife and family, being inscribed on the back, respectively:

"To Mother." "To Father."

"Can we open this?" said Hi, taking up the parcel addressed to Mrs. Nolan Raymond.

"It is not sealed," answered the general. "As a Justice of the Peace I will take upon myself to examine it," whereupon he opened the paper and presently exhibited a double-gilt locket, in which were two portraits.

"The count!" cried Hi, glancing at the first, then, reversing the frame and seeing the portrait on the back, added: "Mrs. Raymond," after which he unscrewed the ring-pin, and taking the locket apart, showed them two locks of hair and an inscription in the count's handwriting:

"Walter Mount and Helen Raymond, married
"4 July 18—
"Protestant Episcopal Church,
"Paris."

"How long will it take to reach Port Royal?" demanded Hi, while Jumba looked at her present, and murmured:

"Ki, dis, fo' me, fo' me!"

"Don't go to Port Royal," urged the general. "Take the cars from Walhalla to Wilmington, via Columbia."

"Will you accompany us?" said the boy.

"No," answered the general. "You go to Poughkeepsie, and if you obtain any proof, telegraph me, when I will join you."

That evening Hi and Birdie started northward.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

HI AND BIRDIE MEET A VERY TOUGH OLD CUSTOMER.

"Po'keepsie!" shouted the deck-hand at the gangway as the boat containing Hi and his chum, drew up to the wharf and made fast. "All ashore that's going ashore—All aboard that's coming."

Taking their valises in their hands, they ran up the brow plank, and in another moment were landed at their destination.

Much to Birdie's sorrow they had come direct from Magnolia to Poughkeepsie. He wanted to see Lillian again.

Proceeding to a hotel they refreshed themselves, then set out to find the Nolan place.

"Nobody seems to know anything of it," murmured Frank Bird, as they vainly asked to be directed to the old homestead, so finally Hi went to the Town Hall and asked to see the tax-collector.

"Nolan Homestead?" mused the man. "Yes, there is such a place; it's away out of town two miles: I guess you will find an old woman there; she had a daughter Nelly. Yes. You go right out there. It's an awful lonely place, but you will easily find it." Then, giving them minute directions, advised them to walk, as the woman shut herself up when she heard a vehicle coming near the house.

"More mystery," chuckled Birdie. "You ain't going out there this afternoon, are you, Hi? It will be dark before we reach the house."

"I don't care, I'm going," returned our hero, and off they started at a swinging trot.

The road was a little used one, and after the first mile, proved very bad, while presently, to add to their discomfort, it began to rain.

"This is nice," groaned Birdie.

"Elegant," grinned Hi. "She's sure to be at home." Then, pointing to a dilapidated house, in a hollow to their left, added: "Guess that's her shanty."

As they neared it they heard a shrill scream, followed by a low cry.

"Hello," murmured Hi, halting and drawing his pistol, a motion followed by his chum.

In another instant one of the upper sashes was thrown open and a woman's head was thrust out of the window, while the person, who was evidently in great terror, cried:

"Help! murder! thieves!"

"We're here, ma'am," cried Hi. "We'll help you," then dashing forward, they entered the house, where they found four tramps busily engaged in the work of robbery.

Standing in the doorway they covered them with their revolvers, crying:

"Drop it and throw up your hands!" whereupon the rogues caved.

"Now, march out, one by one, and git," said Hi. "You can't go far, for our men are waiting on all the roads."

This was a blind to scare the fellows, but it succeeded, and the tramps put out of that two-ten.

When they were gone, the old woman crept down, but she proved to be so deaf that they could not make her understand a word, so finally they gave her the package, addressed "Mrs. Nolan Raymond," whereupon she said:

"Is this for me? I can't read."

Hi nodded, and when she had opened it, she remarked:

"My da'ter and her husband—much obliged to you, young fellers."

"Your daughter is dead!" bawled Hi.

"Want a bed?" she answered. "Oh, yes, I can accommodate you if you will pay me fifty cents each." They nodded assent, then prepared to somehow get information out of her; however, it proved almost impossible.

She talked enough, but never on the right topic. About eight o'clock she retired to bed, and left the lads to remain up as long as they desired.

"She's a regular old mummy, ain't she?" observed Birdie. "Even when you pointed to her daughter's picture, she jawed about them tramps."

"Yes," nodded Hi. "No wonder. See what the

mean cusses were packing up. Her bible and spectacles—a lot of papers and stockings—dern 'em."

"When I was on the road," observed Birdie, "I never did anything so mean—fancy stealing an old woman's bible?"

"S'pose we have a peep in that same book?" suggested Hi. "We may learn something;" whereupon he took the volume from the bundle, in which it was tied with the other plunder, and, opening it at the first fly leaf, discovered a record of Mrs. Raymond's birth, also of her marriage with Walter Mount.

"This is good evidence," mused Hiram; "but it isn't what we want."

"We must get the old lady to talk," said Birdie, adding, "it's no use our sitting up; s'pose we go to bed?"

They retired and were soon fast asleep, never waking for even a moment until daybreak, when they descended to the kitchen, where they found Mrs. Raymond preparing breakfast.

She had quite recovered from her fright, and chattered on like a magpie, the lads listening, but not even catching a hint of what they wanted to learn.

After the meal was over, she seated herself by the table and began to sort out the pile of loot that the tramps had gathered from her bureau, talking all the while like an ancient parrot, saying:

"My da'ter married a young feller named Mount, and they quarreled years ago. I haven't seen my Nelly for a long time. I've got papers here of hers which them cusses did not find, her letters and a heap of trash."

On hearing this, Hi rose, and going close to her, roared into her ear:

"Your daughter is dead!"

He had found the way to communicate with her, for the old woman at once replied:

"Dead? Did she leave me any money?"

"Yes," nodded Hi.

"How much?" demanded the old lady, who was a perfect miser. "I'm awful poor and want to leave this place."

"Several thousand dollars," he shouted. "We want you to give us all the papers you have of hers, and to take them to the court for you."

"Eh?" she snapped. "No, you don't. Da'ter told me that if she died, I was only to give them to one of three persons; you can't bounce me out of them, young man."

"If I name the three, will that satisfy you?" he bawled.

"Yes," she motioned.

"Hiram Hildreth, Nelly Raymond, Lillian Montale," he cried, but she only shook her head, and observed in a suspicious tone:

"I knowed you was an impostor."

"Will you accompany us to New York and see a lawyer there?" roared Hi, on which she returned:

"Oh, no, I won't have anything to do with lawyers. I must go before a court and put my case in a judge's hands."

"You'll come to New York, then?" Hi said.

"Yes," she nodded, "I will do that," then retiring, presently came back dressed in a most ancient costume, and announced that she was ready to depart.

The boys quitted the house, leaving her to lock up, and in a short time she joined them.

They reached Poughkeepsie about four o'clock, and crossing the river, took the train for New York, every one observing:

"What a strange-looking woman that is."

CHAPTER XXXIX.

IN WHICH THE ENTIRE MYSTERY IS REVEALED.

On reaching New York the boys engaged a hack, and took the old lady to Lillian's guardian, who, after hearing their story, attempted to question her, but she resolutely refused to reply, saying:

"I'll tell a judge all I know, and only a judge," so they left her alone until the next day.

In a short time Lillian, who had been to the theater, arrived, when great was the delight of Hiram and the confusion of our friend Birdie.

That night and far into the morning was spent by Lillian and the boys in recounting their experiences since they parted, and you may be sure that Birdie went up in the young lady's estimation.

When they retired to rest, Frank observed to his chum:

"Guess I'll go west, old man."

"What for?" chuckled Hi, who saw that his friend was in love with Lillian. "If you go west I shall go back to Whitehall and finish my time with Mr. Dick."

"Can you keep a secret?" whispered Birdie.

"Can you?" asked Hi.

"I believe I can," replied Frank. "I—I—I'm in love with Lillian, and she don't care a red for me, because I have been a bad lot."

"See here, pal," smilingly answered Hi. "That ain't no secret, and bless you—don't worry about the past. If a boy who had once gone wrong only does what is right in future, he's all right in every way. Why, my dear chum, Lillian thinks a heap of you," adding in a lower tone. "Now, mine is a real secret—I'm in love with Dollie Beamish—but—here he paused and sighed—"I don't believe her father will consent to our being married."

"Shoo!" chuckled Birdie. "Don't you worry about that—he'll be jes delighted to have you for a son-in-law. Your being in love with Miss Dollie ain't no secret—he knows it."

"Wish I could think so," murmured Hiram. "He always seems so stern like, as if he suspected something."

"All your imagination," said Birdie. "I tell you, when you get your rights, the general will jes hand Miss Dollie over to you and be mighty pleased to see you happy—but, do you really think, old chum, I've any chance with Miss Lillian?"

"If you never do a wrong act, you have," replied our hero, adding, "but, there, we're all too young to think about being married yet."

The next day they conducted the old lady to the Supreme Court, where a judge, a friend of Lillian's guardian, granted Mrs. Raymond an audience; whereupon she produced a small package of papers, saying:

"This is my da'ter's will, and with it is a paper that I am to give to one of three persons."

"I can name them," gravely replied Lillian's guardian. "They are Joseph Revere, Evoline Revere, and Eunice Revere."

The old lady made him repeat these names thrice, then remarked in an undertone:

"Yes, you've got me now," after which she proceeded to search in the package, which was very tightly packed with documents, and handing out a paper, said:

"If you will guarantee that I shall have three thousand dollars, left by my da'ter, this is yours."

"But I must first read it," said Lillian's guardian; however, the old girl was firm. "She wasn't going to be fooled by a lawyer," she said, and it took some time to explain to her that, until they saw the paper, they could not decide whether Nelly was Mrs. Raymond's daughter, and as such entitled to the money left, or that she, the old lady, was the true heiress.

At length she yielded, on the condition that the judge should read the paper while she held it, and if he wanted it, pay her a thousand dollars for the same.

All being settled, she slowly unfolded the precious document, when Lillian's guardian read, in a loud, clear voice, the following:

"Confession of Helen Mount, known as Helen Raymond."

"As, like all others, I some day have to die, and as I have committed great crimes, for which I may by this be able to atone, I hereby solemnly declare the following to be a true account of the histories of a boy known as Hiram Hildreth, a girl known as Helen Raymond, and another girl known as Lillian Montalo."

"Seventeen years ago I was engaged as maid servant by a Southern lady named Mrs. Revere, wife of Joseph Revere; at the same time I introduced to them my intended husband, a New York sport, named Walter Mount, who took service as Mr. Revere's valet, I having learned that my mistress had a lot of diamonds, which she carried with her, and which were said to be worth a hundred thousand dollars."

Here the reader paused, for, just then Nelly entered the court room and was permitted to join the group, the lawyers, who formed the outer audience, bowing to her as she passed them.

She had felt a presentiment that she was wanted in New York, and had come on by the night train, gone to the judge's house, and learned that Hi had arrived and was at the court.

After the relatives had chatted a moment or two, the judge once more read the first part of the confession, then, amid a dead silence, during which Hi, Lillian and Nelly sat hand in hand, continued:

"We, that is Walter and myself, went to Paris with our employers, but Mr. Revere so jealously watched his wife's diamonds that we never could tell in which trunk they were, and thus, waiting for our chance, we spent two years, during which I persuaded Walter to marry me, and three children, Joseph and Evoline, twins, and Eunice, were born to our employers."

"One day Mr. Revere died, quite suddenly, and was buried, the authorities attending and accepting the idea that he had died of heart-disease, but I, at the time, suspected differently."

"Then Mrs. Revere and her children, accompanied by Walter and myself, embarked on a wine-laden ship for Port Royal. On our way, Mrs. Raymond died suddenly—poisoned by my husband. Then he secured her diamonds, and leaving her baggage, quitted the ship out at sea, pretending that he must be put on board a vessel we were bound for New York, as Mrs. Revere belonged there."

"That wine-laden ship was lost before she reached South Carolina."

"When we were taken to the New York bound vessel, Walter gave his name as Count Montalo, while I was obliged to assume my old one of Helen Raymond."

"Soon after this my son Walter was born, but I was not allowed to own him. This made me hate my husband. The crimes, for the count, as he called himself, no doubt poisoned both my master and mistress in order to obtain the diamonds, made him crazy and for years I feared for my life."

"First of all he became insanely fond of our son Walter, and in order that young Joseph Revere might never learn the truth, he determined to kill him, but, being afraid, hired a gipsy named Simon Lee to do his evil work, compelling me on the same night, to take Nelly, a girl of whom I was fond, to the East River."

"Instead of doing this, I took her to the Foundling Hospital and there met the gipsy, to whom I gave Helen, as we called her, asking him to leave the little ones as brother and sister. As he had given the child, Joseph, the name of Hiram Hildreth, I merely added "and sister Helen" to the card."

"Lillian, that is Eunice Revere, the youngest girl, was placed out to board, as, though my husband hated her, he feared to commit any more murders."

"His life is one awful torture. He lives dreading that some day his crimes will be revealed, while I dare not confess, for he would murder me."

"He sold Mrs. Revere's diamonds in small parcels, some in this country, and others in France and England, keeping our marriage always a secret."

The only evidence I had was my picture and his sent with others, South, to be forwarded to my mother, but which never reached her. In the lining of the frame of my portrait, between two pieces of card board, cut to fit in, is my marriage certificate."

"HELEN MOUNT."

After reading this, the judge said:

"Then comes a legal attestation of her signature, and the seal and signature of a notary public, after which is an addenda," whereupon he continued as follows:

"POUGHKEEPSIE, June —, 18—."

"I am tired of the madman who has blighted my life. I find that the girl Helen, or Evoline, is living in Whitehall, Northern New York—the boy is also there. I will claim her as my child, take her to France, marry her to a rich man—for she is said to be a beauty—and, confessing all, compel Walter to acknowledge me. I have lived a fearful life of misery with him—will be revenged upon him yet."

"HELEN MOUNT."

When he had concluded, the old woman wished to know if she was to have her daughter's money, and on being informed that she was the only claimant to it, for Nelly would not touch it, agreed to give up the document.

"Why are them children weeping?" she sharply demanded, as she glanced at Hi, Lillian and Nelly.

"They are the three heirs, named by your daughter," shouted the judge. "They are Joseph Revere and his sisters, Evoline and Eunice."

The lawyers present held a long consultation, and finally it was decided to appoint fresh guardians; the presiding judge, who was also judge in the probate court, naming Lillian's old guardian with General Beamish and Mr. Dick.

"Joseph Revere," he said, as he took our hero's hand, "your parents were foully treated, murdered by that wretch, Walter Mount, but God never permits a crime to go unpunished; we sometimes imagine that He does; but it is not so, and all that Mount's plotting, crime and sin brought him and the wretched woman, his wife, was madness, misery and death. You have worked like a man to clear your name and the names of your sisters, and have had your reward. Now, take my advice, all three of you go South and see your cousin, Major Brewer; I do not think that he is a bad man. Show him this document; let him see the portraits, and offer to share the estate with him."

That evening Hi or rather Joseph and his sisters, accompanied by Birdie, embarked for South Carolina.

CHAPTER XL.

JUSTICE ALL ROUND.

A WEEK after the occurrence of the events narrated in the last chapter, a group of young people were assembled in the big parlor of General Beamish's house, while seated in the veranda, were the general himself, Lillian's guardian, and Mr. Dick, Josephus Crick, Sarah and Jumba, the two latter radiant in bright-colored muslin, looking as gorgeous as red-poppies.

"I bet you a dollar he won't come," said Frank Bird, who was one of the group inside. "He refused to see you, and will force you to a law suit—see if he don't."

"I do not believe it," observed our hero, who was seated by the side of his beloved Dorethea. "He said if we would collect all the evidence, he would meet us to-day, but he wanted everybody to be here."

As he spoke, a carriage arrived with Mrs. Dick and Mrs. Bird, the first-mentioned lady having waited in New York in order to bring Frank's mother on.

Great excitement followed their entrance, and, as usual, Mrs. Bird began to talk about her boy, when the latter cut her short by going to the window and calling in Jumba, introducing her as the real person who had done something for the heirs, thus giving the old lady a show and preventing his mother from saying too much.

Jumba was in her element; she related stories of "de ole massa an' missis," and enjoyed the praise lavished upon her, while Sarah, who also came in for her share, smiled, and said:

"De good day am come, tank de Lawd."

Precisely at the appointed moment, Major Brewer, accompanied by his lawyer, rode up to the hall door.

Dismounting, he saluted General Beamish and the other guardians appointed by the court, then introducing his lawyer, entered the parlor, bowed to the young folks, and seating himself, said:

"I am now ready to listen to your claim," whereupon the general rose, and in a long speech, told the story, calling upon the witnesses as he proceeded, and piling up proof upon proof, until finally, turning to our hero, he said:

"There is young Joseph Revere, son of your murdered cousin, and these," taking Evoline and Eunice by the hand, "are her daughters; they do not ask you to give up all your fortune, but that you will, without going to law and ruining the estate, do them justice," saying which he seated himself, while Birdie, utterly unable to control his feeling, rose, and cried:

"Bully for you, general!"

"Hush," whispered his chum, pulling him back into his seat.

In a few moments, after consulting his lawyer, Major Brewer rose and said:

"Gentlemen and ladies—I have listened most attentively and taken good advice—this is my determination;" then, advancing, he took Hiram's hands and continued, in a voice broken with emotion: "Cousin Joseph, I will give you back all—only, until you are of age, you must let me be your sole guardian,"—then taking Nelly and Lillian by the hand, added, as he kissed them: "God knows I would not be so base as to injure orphans like yourselves, even were you not my relatives. Evoline, Eunice, you must learn to love your cousin."

* * * * *

One evening, years after the orphans were reconciled to their relative, three couples of young men and women were promenading the veranda encircling the beautiful mansion known as Hildreth Hall, a grand pile built

on the spot where once stood the ruins of the Gardiner mansion.

Jumba was dead and Sarah was housekeeper of the home. Birdie, the general overseer of the cotton-works, was living near with his mother, and their old troubles were memories of the past.

They had just learned that Mrs. Nolan Raymond was dead, and had left all her money to Evoline, and the young people were laughing at her about it.

"I shall not touch it," said the young lady. "I'll take it, as she has no family, and if I didn't, the money would go to the state, but I shall donate it all to the Foundling Asylum, to the good sisters who were second mothers to us."

Just then a lurid light shot up from a ginning-works, and our hero, seizing the rope of the alarm bell rang out a warning peal for the hands to assemble, then, as Frank, now a handsome young man, joined him, quietly observed to the ladies:

"I shall not be a minute. This is very unfortunate, but we must bear it," after which joined by a gentleman named Barton, Evoline's betrothed, he went off to put out the flames.

"There's a brave brother," said Evoline, admiringly, then, turning to Dollie and Eunice, added, "come, let us take pity upon our worshipers, and make them happy. Barton has waited—Frank is a first rate, splendid fellow, and Hi, I mean Joseph, has mastered himself. What do you say?"

They smiled, and that night Evoline, or Nelly accepted Mr. Barton—Dollie said "yes" to our hero, and Eunice or Lillian whispered assent to the prayer of our old friend, Frank Bird.

Through fire, water and pestilence, through mystery, and over every obstacle, the boy, once known as Hiram Hildreth had beat his way, until at last, he was a man, husband of the girl he loved, but, to this day, he says: "I never was worth anything or did anything worth being proud of, until I learned to be MASTER OF MYSELF."

[THE END.]

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